

The Way Forward

Notes for Remarks by Mayor Mike Savage to the
Halifax Chamber of Commerce

December 12, 2012

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Good afternoon. It's a pleasure for me to speak to the Chamber of Commerce, an organization of which I've been a member, and served on committees, over many years. Thank you, Kim for the great introduction, and thanks to RBC for your sponsorship of this event.

It's good to see so many people here today that I know, including many of my Council colleagues, and so many people that I know love Halifax as I do. Who feel proud and blessed to live here and raise their families here. Who choose to live here, and don't want to be anywhere else.

We've done pretty well. Look at what we have achieved in recent years: Canada Games; the new Central Library and Convention Centre; HRMbyDesign; the MetroX service.

These successes occurred when the community came together, put aside particular, individual concerns, and embraced an idea.

But I also think that many of you believe, as I do, that we can be a better city—a bigger city, not just in numbers, but in other, more important ways.

Here is the question:

We all know that Halifax is a **good** place to live. But are we a **great** place to live and do business? If you think we're great, are we as great as we can be?

We certainly have the potential to be a great city.

Too often, we've missed opportunities. We haven't understood our capacity for greatness.

And we haven't identified our strengths... so that we can build on them.

I invite you to imagine with me Halifax as we could be:

Surrounding the Harbour is a vibrant downtown. Small businesses thrive. New developments demonstrate bold thinking without diminishing our proud heritage. People of all ages—all incomes—live, work, shop and play downtown.

Imagine a Halifax that fosters entrepreneurial spirit in every corner of the municipality, including rural areas.

In this new Halifax, we are fortunate that our municipality includes entrepreneurs who are also leaders in the production of food: farmers and fishers support our food security, and are able to find local and export markets for their products. Tourists enjoy the night life of the city, and the tranquillity and beauty of our rural treasures.

A great Halifax is a magnet for strong businesses, and the talent those businesses require. Our universities and community college work in concert with the private sector and government to drive business solutions—making Halifax the leading creative economy in Canada.

In our great Halifax, our artists are celebrated. Our streets are safe. We are a healthy community, where people move easily and efficiently throughout the municipality, whether they walk, bike, or drive, with the option of a transit system that meets their needs. Where we encourage sustainable new development, protect our green spaces, and have a tax system designed for growth.

Imagine a Halifax where we have plans that support sustainable growth, because all departments are aligned around key objectives. And we follow those plans with a streamlined bureaucracy focussed on building our economy.

I imagine a Halifax that is somewhat different from what we have today. A Halifax that exudes confidence, works cooperatively, and expresses “can-do” in our thinking.

A Halifax that understands and exploits our strengths.

All of these things are within our reach, because we have a head start on most other cities.

Counting our strengths

Look at our assets. Halifax has a very large public sector presence: the military, three levels of government, health facilities, and universities and a great community college. The ship-building contract is another large play by the federal government in our local economy.

That kind of public sector presence, with its relatively stable, well-paid workforce, can lead to complacency and risk-aversion. I suggest it has too often been a cushion.

Instead, it can be a launching pad for creative partnerships, for entrepreneurial excellence, and for a more diverse economy.

Today, we have the opportunity to leverage the economic activity around ship building and other positive signs to transform our economy—we have a chance to determine how we will grow and shape this community.

Our location has always been one of our greatest strengths—we’ve been a Gateway throughout our history. Our Port sits on a deep, year-round harbour, close to major trade routes, with a break bulk and special cargo facility in Sheet Harbour. Our airport wins awards year after year.

Halifax is unique in the range of disciplines and research opportunities offered by our academic institutions. Universities are a huge strategic asset and willing partners in creating a stronger, more diverse and talented Halifax.

Our universities and colleges are economic drivers in a creative, knowledge-based economy. And they are significant partners with business and in finding solutions... and marketing those solutions beyond our shores.

While many people who live here are unaware of the significance of the research that happens locally, it’s frequently noted around the world. That’s why Angela Merkel included Halifax on her recent visit to

Canada—as a scientist, and a leader of Europe’s most resilient economy, she came to Halifax to learn about our work in ocean science.

That work attracts more than the German Chancellor. It is a catalyst for growth in our marine industries. And, it is our reputation as a leader in fields as diverse as ocean science, aerospace, defence, biotech, finance, IT and health that attracts people and businesses to Halifax to study, and to take advantage of the intellectual resources we offer.

Did you realize that Nova Scotia’s universities generate more than \$800 million —yes, nearly \$1 billion— in annual export revenue. Much of that is a result of the large number of out-of –province and international students, which is now at 45 per cent of total enrollment.

And Halifax, as the post-secondary centre of the province, sees much of that benefit. We must work more closely with our academic institutions. Halifax benefits from the reputation of our universities, and the universities benefit from their connection with Halifax. So it makes sense to do more together.

Last summer, I met with the university presidents to talk about how we can strengthen the MOU between the city and our academic institutions. I’ll meet them early in the new year to begin that process.

Already, the Community College is preparing for the training requirements of the ship building contract and other emerging industries. They offer the kind of flexible and experiential learning that meet the needs of both the students and businesses across Nova Scotia.

As a result of our universities and college, we have a well-educated workforce. We graduate thousands of bright young people every year, eager to make their mark and share their fresh skills with the world. Many of them are local students with family and community ties. Of the 45 per cent who are from another province or country, many want to stay here.

And they are exactly the newcomers we want and need: young, well-educated, and culturally diverse.

How do we keep them here?

One way is to provide opportunity—right away. If graduates need to leave Halifax to get the experience to qualify for a job here, it’s hard to get them back.

As we consider recruitment and succession planning within HRM, part of the solution will be specifically to hire and mentor new post-secondary graduates—starting this year.

GHP’s connector program is a good example of what to do. It helps immigrants, recent grads, and young professionals expand their business network. In 2 years, more than 400 business people have signed up, and nearly 150 immigrants, students and young professionals have found permanent work.

This idea is now being implemented in 14 Canadian cities in 8 provinces.

I commend GHP and Fusion for their initiatives to encourage hiring of recent graduates, and I encourage Chamber members to consider where in their organizations there might be room for an intern or a new hire.

It has been said that Halifax embraces the past and respects the future. I believe we need to reverse that. We must respect the rich traditions and heritage of our past. But great cities reach out and grasp the future. That's what we must do.

Getting there: Government

And we have to do it together. Government has a role, but so do the private sector, not-for-profits, and social enterprises.

Let share with you some of the things that I believe we can do as a municipality.

We've spent a lot of time in Halifax telling ourselves that great things happen in other places, not here. While I want to be clear that I'm not endorsing Maritime Union, I think it's time to stop competing with other Maritime communities. I want Sydney, Moncton and other centres to do well. But instead of comparing ourselves with smaller cities, we should be comparing Halifax with successful larger cities.

In fact, we should competing with Boston, Ottawa, or Montreal—working with Moncton, Saint John, Charlottetown, Sydney and other centres as a Maritime leader.

That's what winners do.

I've seen that winning attitude among some of our entrepreneurs and business people. It's an attitude we need in City Hall.

Regulatory and Policy Action

I believe government can benefit by adopting a more entrepreneurial attitude. Yes, we need regulations, applied consistently and intelligently, with an understanding that we have a common objective: a prosperous, healthy community.

However, we've all heard stories about the difficulty of getting an answer from Halifax on a proposal or application. I am determined that we can't have good ideas getting a maybe in Halifax and a yes in other places. We can't guarantee a yes, but serious proposals deserve an answer in reasonable time.

I believe that we've reached a point in HRM where the mountain of rules, regulations, and procedures no longer protects the public interest. It catches everyone up in a ponderous, complicated, and expensive process that effectively discourages innovation and kills ingenuity—in both the private and public sectors.

We can improve our processes. Some of my earliest conversations with the CAO and senior staff were about changes to allow professional staff to work more effectively, and more productively. We've

established an aggressive plan to restructure the planning and development department, to ensure that we have the right people in the right places to achieve optimal service levels.

Other initiatives, such as ‘navigators’ to help business people and others find a path through the maze of regulations, or the provision of better direction to industry on the application process, will allow us to be more responsive to the needs of business, without compromising the quality of municipal oversight.

With the introduction of HRMbyDesign, and the Centre Plan, we’re building a framework for evaluation of applications that will not require the resource-consuming case-by-case review. Recent decisions of Council have offered developers confidence that we’ll follow our plans, and provide a predictable review process for proposals that fall within the plans.

This will allow us to put our resources on more detailed consideration of those proposals that fall outside the plan, and on the strategic exercise of ensuring that plans continue to reflect the public vision of our community’s future.

To achieve this, we need the province to act on amendments to the Halifax Charter. Unfortunately, two key amendments—for site plan approval and for density bonus legislation—were introduced too late to be passed in the last Legislative Session.

If Halifax is to continue to be the driver of the provincial –indeed the regional–economy, we must have the tools to generate and support economic growth. This Council, this Mayor, are prepared to take responsibility for decisions on the future of our City, but we need a Charter that provides the authority to support responsible decision-making.

A revitalized downtown will take more than plans. Our economic strategy identifies the need for investment, by all three levels of government as well as the private sector. As part of our current budget process, we’ll be seeking opportunities to earmark monies to make investment in downtown, and to leverage similar commitments from other levels of government.

The Cogswell Interchange is one of those opportunities for the municipality to lead in the creation of iconic downtown development. It is an opportunity to bring an international focus, local citizen participation, and a legacy project to our downtown.

Another current priority, streetscaping, will improve the walkability, and enhance the business potential of our urban core.

Reducing red tape and increasing investment are important. So is reviewing our tax structure. Good tax policy is one of the best instruments in the municipal government tool box to support regional plans for development, and we recognize the importance of getting it right.

It makes sense to start any review with the commercial tax rate, understand what the problem is, and consider the options. Much good work was done in the tax reform process undertaken by the last Council, and we have to learn from that effort. Other ideas will be considered.

A fair and reasonable tax regime will be part of Halifax's growth story. *City as Catalyst*

Beyond the practical levers of regulatory practice, good governance and policy, government can provide the public square for conversations and common actions by the diverse sectors of our community. We are in a position to build links between not for profits, businesses, universities and colleges, and citizens with good ideas and commitment to our common vision of prosperity and health. The municipal government has a responsibility to consider how economic development in the urban core benefits rural HRM, and an equally great responsibility to support opportunities in our rural communities.

We have other resources—buildings, land, and expertise—that can be directed to incubate innovative small businesses or social enterprises.

And we must be more supportive of our arts and culture.

Someone said to me recently that NSCAD is better known in Copenhagen than in Halifax—and that's probably true. Artists who come here to study or to teach enrich the city with their presence, but they also generate significant revenue through their work. As businesses and people consider locations, cities with a symphony orchestra, a lively theatre scene, musicians, and vibrant visual arts have an advantage. Cities where architects design interesting buildings, where public spaces include provocative public art attract attention. They attract talent, and they attract investment.

We have those things in Halifax.

We need more of them.

We need to start sharing them with the world.

I've said many times that I want to be the Marketer in Chief for Halifax—a champion of this community as a place to do business, a place to live, and a place to visit, not because I think I'm the best salesman in town, or in this room. But because I believe the Mayor is uniquely positioned to add value to your efforts to attract business and investment. I want to work with the Chamber, GHP, the Port and airport to determine where I can play a role.

Because the next time a German Chancellor stops by, all of our economic partners should be prepared to introduce her to the full range of opportunity for German business here in Halifax.

I also believe we need a stronger voice on the national scene, not only lobbying the federal government, but working with our civic counterparts across Canada.

Leading US political scientist Benjamin Barber has suggested that cities are the level of government where "things get done", because they act less ideologically and pragmatically than nation states.

One of my first experiences as Mayor was a meeting of the Big Cities Mayors Caucus. This is our opportunity to influence the national conversation, and I intend to make the most of it. Currently, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Big Cities Mayors are working on renewed infrastructure funding agreements with the federal government. This is critical to us, and to municipalities throughout

the country. Without continued funding from the federal government to restore and replace aging infrastructure, this country faces a crisis. By participating with the other large cities, our voice is strengthened.

The next area of focus for the Big Cities Mayors is national housing. I intend to be a very active participant in the national conversation on housing, and I will look to Chamber members, as well as others in all parts of the municipality, for advice and input. We have some successful experience in Halifax, including private sector support for and involvement in housing, which we can share with the rest of the country, and we have things to learn from other cities.

Safe, affordable housing for all of our citizens is the foundation of social inclusion and healthy community. Let's agree on this principle first, then consider jurisdictional responsibilities.

This Chamber deserves credit for your recognition that social inclusion and healthy city initiatives are intimately linked to economic strength. In fact, at my first meeting as Mayor with Paula Gallagher and Valerie Payn, we talked about the importance of social cohesiveness and a healthy city as an integral piece of economic development.

I believe that, with these measures, Halifax can become a more welcoming City. And we can begin to build on our strengths to achieve the greatness we all know is possible.

But it isn't something the municipality can do alone. I need your help.

My door is open for a discussion of issues and concerns with Council and the Mayor. I'll carry the banner to federal and provincial governments. I'll be part of trade and business development missions. I'll listen to the problems, and I'll work with you to achieve the solutions. I'll sell our city and our potential here and I will take it on the road.

This city has overcome challenges before. Last Friday, we marked the 95th anniversary of the Halifax Explosion, which destroyed lives and neighbourhoods in a few devastating moments. In the wake of that catastrophe, a poster was produced that said simply:

“We shall never rebuild Halifax unless everybody works.”

That poster hangs on my wall at City Hall.

Today, our challenge is a bit different. We have opportunities to make the leap to greatness. But we shall never do it unless everybody works.

I'm privileged to be your Mayor.

And I'm privileged to work with this Council, with you, and with others to reach higher, be bolder, and become a greater Halifax

The one we want to be, and that we know we can be.