



Mayor Ian Hamilton State of the City Address May 8th, 2012

Introduction

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you to the Battlefords Chamber of Commerce, President Pat Smith and the Chamber board for providing this new opportunity to hear from your Mayors about the state of our communities. I bring you greetings on behalf of the city of North Battleford.

City Employees

To begin, I am grateful for the opportunity to publically acknowledge, and thank, the hundreds of City employees that serve the residents of North Battleford so capably and competently every day. There is no better way to start this 'State of the City' address – assuring all of you that our public servants are well trained and committed to your community, their community.

This team of devoted City employees is led by a man recognized nationally and internationally as a man of action and innovation, leader and motivator -- City Manager Jim Toye.

Several members of City staff are present today, and I would ask them to stand and be acknowledged.

My thanks, and on behalf of the citizens of North Battleford, a collective thanks to Councilors representing the interests of our community: Ron Crush, Ray Fox, Grace Lang, Don Buglas, Brad Pattinson, and Trent Houk.

Council Focus

“NORTH BATTLEFORD is a dynamic community built on the strength and diversity of its people where we live, work and play.”

That is the vision adopted by this City Council, the vision that guides us and your City Administration every day.

City Council’s mission is to provide leadership in promoting a vibrant, healthy economy and environment for all businesses and the people who live and work here.

We live up to our vision and mission by embracing values of balance, fairness, equity, consistency, transparency, accountability, empowerment, and respect for those we serve, and of those who serve. We have set strategic priorities that articulate this, and give clear direction to administration. This focus keeps us moving forward and gives the people of North Battleford a clear view of our direction.

Our Attitudes

Ladies and gentlemen, in 2013, North Battleford will celebrate its' 100th Anniversary as an incorporated city. We'll celebrate from one of the best positions we've ever been in when it comes to capitalizing on opportunity for growth and expansion -- you can physically see it happening all around us.

However, it isn't just new bricks and mortar I'm noticing. I am seeing an attitudinal change in our community that, quite honestly, has not been shown in decades. An attitude of 'Yes we can' has emerged and been embraced. It is an attitude supported by this City Council and Administration. It is an attitude being championed by entrepreneurs and investors.

This positive attitude is coming from our citizens, who are resonating with confidence and pride. I witnessed it this past weekend during the Annual community clean-up, co-sponsored this year by the Battlefords United Way and the Communities in Bloom committee, where 120 people showed up (on a cold dreary Saturday) to pitch-in and pick-up, because they care about how our City looks and how it is perceived.

Did you know there is a whole army of people of all ages and walks of life who are already pouring a ton of their time and planning into ensuring the 2013 North Battleford Centennial is an entire year of community celebration? These people were not handpicked.

They're community volunteers with kids, families, businesses and various other commitments who did not hesitate to sign up when we put out the call. All of that is a great example of commitment, pride and positive attitude in North Battleford.

Culture

The people of North Battleford are also investing significantly in supporting and developing recreational, arts and cultural venues and activities that residents, and anyone considering relocating to our City, desire.

The internationally acclaimed Allen Sapp Gallery and our Chapel Gallery are long standing testaments to North Battleford's commitment to arts and culture.

With its' state-of-the-art performing arts theatre, a new 6 sheet curling rink, a field house featuring 2 in-door soccer pitches, and a destination entertainment aquatic center, the CUPlex will solidify our city's position as the hub of Saskatchewan's Northwest. It will offer outstanding entertainment, and recreation activities so necessary for a growing community.

Thank you to all, you have invested wisely in your communities future.

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize the persistence and commitment of the CUPlex Fundraising Committee. They set out to raise \$10 million toward this major

project, are less than \$600 thousand away from reaching that goal.

What an amazing accomplishment!

Our Economy

The City of North Battleford has always been in the enviable position of being the hub of a trading area containing an estimated 55,000 people.

On the Trans-Canada Yellowhead highway, and highways 4 and 40, we are the center.

Think about all the people who move through here on these highways every day. We want to entice those people to stop, take a look at North Battleford and maybe spend some money and learn a little of what our City offers and what opportunities may exist here for them.

That's what your Council and Administration continue to focus on, but we don't do it alone.

The onus on everyone in this room is to attract labour, market ourselves, and trumpet our opportunities and quality of life. There is much more work to do and challenges ahead, and I know we are up to the task.

We are the new home of not one, but two power plants.

We have all the transportation options with highway, rail service, an improved air terminal and bus transit route.

A significant heavy oil supply exists within our immediate boundaries and is being explored.

We are already the center of service to northwest Saskatchewan with an ever affluent agricultural sector that is an economic driver of this community.

All of this means we also have excellent access to, and are capable providers of healthcare, education, post secondary opportunities, retail and cultural service.

So let me take a few minutes now to share with you specific areas of both opportunity and concern:

Housing

North Battleford City Council and Administration are working to respond to current housing demands, and are committed to addressing housing gaps in our City.

We supported the development of a Level 3 and 4 seniors housing community in Fairview Heights, championed by local investor Glenn Hornick. Harwood Manor is now complete and provides 90 beds in 72 rooms. Individuals and couples will live together in secure and relaxed surroundings knowing health care, cleaning services and food services are always available.

Also for our seniors, we are working with community supporters of a seniors' assisted living complex which will potentially provide as many as 90 additional living units in North Battleford.

Because of the larger projects underway in our area that have brought in hundreds of contractors and tradespeople over the past couple of years, the rental market has become very tight in North Battleford. In response, we have supported the conversion of a former office building at the corner of 11th Avenue and 103rd Street to 26 affordable apartment units.

The walls on another 21 unit entry level condominium project are going up in Kildeer Park. The City worked with the developer of that project in developing a grant program to assist qualifying home buyers in attaining down payments. Some of those buyers will exit the rental market, freeing up more rental units in North Battleford.

The City has also committed to the development of an additional 39 serviced residential lots in Fairview Heights and we are working with private developers to add approximately 40 more residential lots in Kildeer Park.

Business

On the industrial side of things, it is clear that expansion is necessary in Parsons Industrial Park with only seven lots left for

development. Because of the anticipated demand, the City Planner is diligently working on a new subdivision to ensure we have lots available.

Traffic will increase in the southeast quadrant when the CU Plex facilities open this summer and fall attracting events, conventions, tournaments, and performances contributing significant economic impact to our entire community. With other existing amenities and attractions in the southeast quadrant, the area is poised to become a hub of activity.

Just as important as that new development, though, is the work that's happening in our downtown. I admit, I wish we could move faster to redevelop and regenerate that neighborhood. That said, there is a committed group of downtown business owners – many of them in this room – who are putting a plan in place to see new life in our downtown.

While the City doesn't own the downtown land and buildings, we know how important a vibrant core is to our community. We *want* local business to thrive there, and we *want* people to be proud of their downtown. We will push forward in the coming year, supporting the community group in policy and improved bylaws to create an environment for business.

We are attracting business, by the way.

Perceptions are changing ever since the release of the Relative Tax Comparison study last year – showing North Battleford having one of the lowest relative tax rates in Saskatchewan. The total amount of municipal and education property taxes per capita was the second lowest of the 8 cities surveyed, 14.9% below the average of those 8 participating cities. This is an excellent tool for Council to measure our service costs to live and do business here, relative to other communities.

In the next while, we can look forward to the opening of Grit Industries with a startup staff of 75 welders, gas fitters, assemblers and equipment operators – a company re-locating to North Battleford from Lloydminster.

We will also see in the near future the ground breaking for the construction of the new Saskatchewan Hospital, a \$100 million+ construction project that will keep hundreds of jobs in the area.

All of these industrial, residential, recreational and cultural developments are bringing people and families into our City.

Crime

I was very excited a few months ago, when MoneySense Magazine came out with its annual ranking of the best places to live in Canada. North Battleford was listed 45th overall of 190 cities across Canada with populations greater than 10,000. This

is an outside, independent testament to many of the things I've just talked about.

Unfortunately, I wouldn't be surprised if many of you didn't know about our ranking – or the fact we'd risen 54 places in this ranking over the past year.

What was reported widely in the media was the fact that we are #1 in the nation in the Canadian Crime Severity Index, one of the factors included in the study. There is no denying it: North Battleford has an issue with crime.

What steps are being taken to improve this situation?

We presented the Saskatchewan Minister of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing Yogi Huyghebaert with a proposal to partner with the City to place 5 additional uniformed police officers on the streets of North Battleford. The City committed to funding two officers and the province saw the need to assist, by funding an additional 3 officers.

The City is also an active partner in a province-wide crime reduction initiative. One of the ideas to emerge from that initiative has many community agencies and resources – public and mental health, addictions, family services, school divisions, police, employment services, and more – partnering to develop and implement immediate, real-time solutions to individual, family and community safety risks.

The concept is modeled after a very successful program championed by the City of Prince Albert Police Department and recognized nationally for its results. Meetings with our own community partners have been very encouraging and work continues to develop the action plan.

Exposure

Ladies and gentlemen, North Battleford is on the move, We've never had so many website hits and so much positive national and international media exposure. In the past year alone, North Battleford has been featured in Award Magazine, Building and Construction Magazine, Enterprise Now, Pipeline News, the Saskatchewan Oil Report, Area Development Magazine -- the list goes on -- not to mention television and radio reports -- all of whom have interest in our growth and our potential.

We are currently anticipating the arrival of the 'Today in America' crew. This is a promotional show, hosted by former Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Terry Bradshaw, who will learn about us, and tell viewers across North America about the Battlefords!

The City has been working with the Today in America crew to develop a script and line up interviews in advance of the five minute piece airing on the Business News Network and various other networks, later this year.

Conclusion

Friends, we are an entrepreneurial City – lead by a driven business sector that has helped bring North Battleford to where it is today. I am encouraged by the willingness of the City, businesses and residents who are going the distance and bragging about what a great place we are, and are becoming.

It's truly my honor to have led City Council these past 2 ½ years. Thank you for allowing me that privilege.

It is the passion and drive of everyone in this room, and everyone in this City, that will ensure our future success.

Thank you and good afternoon.