



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

18 May 2016

“State of the City” address

Mayor Ian Hamilton spoke at the “5th State of the Town & City Address” organized by the Battlefords Chamber of Commerce on May 18.

“Thank you once again to the Battlefords Chamber of Commerce for providing an opportunity to share with you some thoughts about the current state, of the City.

As I was not able to be with you at this time last year, I can’t begin to tell you how very happy I am to be with you this year, and I bring you greetings on behalf of Council, and residents of the City of North Battleford.

We are very pleased with our success in developing and endorsing our annual budget in a very timely manner, this years’ budget being passed by Council prior to the end of December, 2015. This provides direction for City Administration to implement operational goals and objectives proactively and also provides our citizens with the information important to them as it relates to taxation, utility and service fees for the year. It also allows for the preparation and release of tender documents early in the calendar year giving a better chance of obtaining competitive bids for major capital projects and purchases.

City Council is pleased to have been able to keep property tax increases (for most properties) under 3% over 2015 rates. Utility rates have also been kept to a minimum, and service fees have been kept competitive as well.

City Council did decide to increase the UPAR frontage foot tax by \$0.60 to \$3.60/foot to realize additional funds to continue the necessary replacement of our aging and ever failing underground pipe and above ground asphalt. This year, it is projected we will attend to 13 blocks of underground pipe and asphalt replacement at an estimated cost of \$3.1M. This is essentially a minimum annual commitment and funds raised by the frontage foot levy/tax are dedicated to the infrastructure program and any surplus \$’s realized will be carried over to the UPAR program in subsequent years.

I do not want to 'skirt' significant issues facing our community, and I must acknowledge that we still have the dubious distinction of being #1 on the Crime Severity list of communities in Canada with populations over 10,000 residents.

What I can report to you is our untiring commitment to address this issue in our City, and our continuing investment in strategies to mitigate risk to our citizens and city properties.

The 5 pillars of our Community Safety strategy are:

- Creating opportunities
- Helping individuals and families with complex needs
- Coordination of existing programs and seeking new programs
- Crime prevention/crime suppression
- Engagement of people within the 'regional community'

The strategy is providing some tremendous results, for example:

- The "Eyes that Care" initiative, including 'Citizens on Patrol' and Neighborhood Watch
- Coordinating activities and community engagement, the SAGE community Action Group (SAGE is an acronym for Safety, Acceptance, Guidance, Engagement)
- Programs that help to fill the 13 – 18 year old gap, such as working with Concern for Youth and the Emergency Services Responders Program where we are partnering with the Province and three high schools, offering a credit program that will prepare youth for a career in emergency services after high school and just as important, and possibly more so, provide a positive organization for youth to feel a sense of belonging. To date, over 135 students have expressed interest in this program, with only 30 seats available.
- Finally, the development and implementation of the Community Safety Officer program in North Battleford is unique in Canada. The protocols, relationships and understandings between the RCMP and the CSO program are groundbreaking and receiving national attention. It has been hard work and I need to commend the commitment of Fire Chief Albert Headrick, City Manager Jim Puffalt, Inspector John Sutherland and Community Safety Coordinator Herb Sutton for their contributions to the program and the safety of our citizens.

And, it should never be understated that the support of your City Council for public safety initiatives is undeniably a significant contributing factor to the accomplishments of this program.

In 2014, it was reported that North Battleford achieved a 17% reduction in the crime as reported in the Crime Severity Index. This was a significant decrease in relation to the rest of Saskatchewan and indeed Canada, and while it appears that 2015 will see some increases in certain types of crime reported, it could be that statistics have increased because our investment in the Community Safety Officer program has relieved RCMP personnel of responsibilities of lower risk and harm activities and allowed them to

concentrate on criminal code and drug offences, both of which saw increases in 2015 over 2014.

Capital investment in our community, as reported through building permit statistics, remained strong throughout 2015 with total \$ value of permits issued exceeding \$29M. This was down from 2014, yet it would be recognized some significant commercial and industrial alteration permits were issued in 2014.

Currently, we can report that a robust capital investment climate is being experienced in 2016 with announced and in ground projects including the Battlefords Trade and Education Centre building, and a new build within the Frontier Centre for the relocation of Dollarama. Of course a new 100 room hotel has been announced for construction beginning in 2016 and obvious expectations of a new franchise restaurant to be developed in the South-east quadrant.

The construction of the new Saskatchewan Hospital will impact the community in the coming two-year construction period, undoubtedly contributing significant economic benefit to local business. I encourage all residents of North Battleford, business and individual, to welcome those visitors participating in our local activities and consumers of goods and services being offered by our business community. And may I take this opportunity to encourage your financial support to the fundraising efforts underway to pay for the furnishings of the new hospital.

The City, with herculean efforts of Leisure Services Director Samborski, Destination Battlefords Executive Director Ryan Bater and his assistant Kerry Volk were successful in winning the bid to host the 2018 Saskatchewan Winter Games. This will be a major economic impact for the City and bring very positive profile to our community. Another significant event to be hosted in January 2017 is the Pinty's Grand Slam of Curling, a nationally televised sporting event followed by millions. Congratulations to the efforts of the Twin Rivers Curling Club and especially Russ Brown and Wayne Cubbon for attracting that very exciting event to North Battleford.

We have received the interim report on the Downtown Revitalization Action Plan, commissioned to Crosby Hanna & Associates. The objective of this project is to produce a plan that will not only guide the development of Downtown North Battleford over the next 25 years but would serve as a catalyst for generating investment and economic activity in the City.

The City has implemented its previously announced 'Regional Opportunities Plan' and in doing so, established a Regional Advisory Committee to help regional partners coordinate on large projects and work together to source new opportunities.

To build upon our strengths as a region, 6 objectives have been identified that may contribute the best opportunities for success, including:

- First Nations engagement
- Value chain manufacturing
- Mineral processing
- Oil & gas
- Agriculture
- Renewable energy sources

Work is ongoing to investigate opportunities in these areas, and develop strategies to achieve the goals and objectives of the advisory committee.

To conclude, I would like to acknowledge one indisputable fact, the 'State of the Town' is significantly impacted and influenced by the 'State of the City', and vice versa.

I am often asked, 'Why are we not one community?', and I do often wonder what 'might' or 'could' be, such as:

- Is there benefit to representing ourselves as one community of nearly 20,000 persons, and the 5th largest City in Saskatchewan?
- Would prospective business interests view us more favorably as one city of 20,000 and the Hub of a Functional Economic Area representing over 95,000 people?
- Together, are we 'more', than just the sum of two parts?

I can't answer the question, "Why are we not one community", because I don't know. I don't know the potential costs, or the potential financial benefit of amalgamation. Do the potential costs outweigh the benefits of a favorable economic environment? Would the financial benefits be sufficient to overcome the sense of loss of autonomy and control?

We need to stop wondering, and research the answers. We need actual information to assess the cost-benefit analysis of any proposal in considering partnerships, cooperation, collaboration or, perhaps even amalgamation of our two communities. And, we need to cooperate and share information in order to gather all that is needed to evaluate the options.

This is the challenge I leave you to consider as residents and business owners in our community, and a challenge for newly elected Councils to ponder as they determine future directions that, hopefully, will lead our communities to future growth and prosperity, providing our future generations with opportunity and a quality of life they will certainly deserve.

For more information:

Susanne Abe, Communication Coordinator, 306-445-1710