

# State of the City

## January 11, 2006

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Ottawa has a history and a heritage that spans back over 150 years. Our new, expanded City of Ottawa celebrated its 5th birthday on January 1st. And this new Ottawa is a better city than it was five years ago.

A city is where we live and therefore, quality of living - or quality of life - is priority one. In September, Decima Research reported that 94% of our residents consider Ottawa one of the best places in the world in which to raise a family. That kind of result is reflected in other surveys about Ottawa, including the Mercer studies that rated Ottawa as one of the top cities in the world for quality of life, as well as for having the lowest cost of living in North America. The latest figures from Statistics Canada concluded that Ottawa has the second lowest violent crime rate in the country after Mississauga. A high quality of life starts with safe neighbourhoods.

And today, again, it is a time for this Council to take stock of some of our successes over the last five years and to point out several priorities for the future.

In the first year of the new City, I called a Smart Growth Summit that heard from both local and global experts as well as local citizens, to provide us with advice on how to move Ottawa forward over the next two decades. The end result was a 20/20 vision for Ottawa to take us to the year 2020 based on a number of principles to help guide us on the issues that affect our neighbourhoods and our economy. From parks, the environment, health, the arts and social supports, to transit services, we developed a blueprint to build our new city. We have made significant progress on many fronts. We all know the new City has had teething pains. The new City had to learn to walk before it ran, but now Ottawa is a stronger city than it was five years ago. Ottawa is also a smarter city than it was five years ago.

Let's start with the economy. Unemployment in Ottawa is at its lowest level in five years. Silicon Valley North is breathing new fire into our economy in both jobs and investment. Compared to 7,600 new jobs in 2004, the high tech industry created 13,600 new jobs in 2005. Last month alone, there were 1,600 new high tech jobs in Ottawa.

This success is due to many factors, including working smarter and harder. For example, when Dell chose Ottawa for a new call centre and 500 new jobs, it was because of efforts of this city, my office and OCRI, in partnership with the provincial government. If Ottawa is to remain competitive in a global economy, then we must continue to fight for jobs - whether it's creating new high tech jobs or pressuring the federal government not to move jobs to other parts of the country for political purposes.

In the life sciences sector, Abbott Point of Care Labs selected the former Nortel Networks Corkstown Road facility for its expansion in Ottawa. One J.J. Barnicke Senior Vice-President touted this as likely the largest commercial real estate deal of its kind in North America this year, and the biggest for Ottawa in more than a decade. The commercial real estate market in Ottawa had a banner 2005 and we can link much of that success to the boom in venture capital investment.

Over the last five years, more than \$4 billion in venture capital money was invested in Ottawa firms - that's almost 30% of all venture capital invested in Canada. This includes an investment of almost \$300 million in 2005 involving firms such as Meriton Networks, Belair Networks and Tropic Networks. Kanata became the commercial real estate story of the year as the vacancy rate plummeted from a high of 30% five years ago to 12% in 2005.

And while Ottawa's west end enjoys the benefits of the high tech rebound, this City Council approved a number of measures to help boost Ottawa's east end economy. One of the major decisions was Council's approval of the proposed new \$25 million Orleans Arts Facility at the Client Service Centre lands on Centrum Boulevard. That development could include a new hotel, seniors' residences or condominiums. We know this project will act as a catalyst for increased economic development in the east end. If all goes well, our stories, our music, our culture and our performers will take to the stage at the new Orleans Arts Facility in 2008.

From the expanded Ray Friel Centre, the Superdome near Blackburn Hamlet, a new paramedic headquarters, the Bell Sensplex in Kanata and a new arena for West Carleton in the works, our city has responded through a public-private partnership model to provide more health, culture and recreational facilities.

Our level of construction is exceptional with cranes piercing the sky throughout Ottawa. There is \$1.5 billion capital investment by the provincial government in hospital and post secondary school expansion under construction – or about to start.

Five years ago, we began the job of building a light rail system in Ottawa. Today, more than 10,000 people a day use the O-train for commuter service from Bayview to Greenboro. I worked with the provincial and federal governments to obtain \$400 million in government funding for light rail expansion from the downtown core to Nepean. Construction on what will be Ottawa's biggest construction project in history will begin later this year. I'm committed to working with senior levels of government to help fast track east-west light rail, something that is in high demand by our residents.

With the City's policy of assisting health care capital, we have been supportive of the construction of new hospital and care facilities by investing \$32.9 million in forgiven development charges, permit fees, donations of land, and grants.

There's one major reason why people choose Ottawa for business or education. It's called quality of life. So, I wasn't surprised when, as I said earlier, Decima Research reported last September that 94% of our residents consider Ottawa one of the best places in the world in which to raise a family.

In addition, I wasn't surprised when that survey revealed that our residents also have some concern over two issues in particular: property taxes and transportation. And that's where we will be focusing.

Property tax reform is critical for the future of all municipalities in Ontario. It's time to get provincial government responsibilities such as health care, social housing, welfare and ambulances off the municipal tax bill, as they are in every other province. Through the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, I've been working with several other Mayors on a strategy to deal with the estimated \$3 billion in provincial costs on municipal tax bills across the province. There has been progress.

In Ottawa's situation, after months of negotiations, the provincial government recognized our predicament and delivered on \$20 million in additional funding for our 2006 budget.

Property tax assessment reform is just as important. It sounds like a broken record every time I speak about the "broken property tax assessment system." But here again, the pressure has led to progress. Two years ago, I convinced Queen's Park to put a freeze on the system. This came after an aggressive lobbying campaign by this City Council during the last provincial election campaign. And this year, because of pressure from Ottawa, the provincial Ombudsman announced an investigation into the way the assessment system works and how appeals are dealt with. We must continue to pressure change in those two areas.

The 'New Deal' for cities is already delivering \$60 million a year for the City of Ottawa from the federal and provincial governments. Most of that money is being used for transit. I have been extremely active with the caucus of Big City Mayors and I'm confident all levels of government will continue to work together so that our cities are treated more equitably.

And for the money we do receive, our taxpayers expect value. They want basic core services protected - core services such as paramedics and ambulance response times. Five years ago, the City had 147 paramedics responding to just under 66,000 calls. Today, there are 312 paramedics who are expected to respond to just under 96,000 calls. We've made major strides in decreasing response times by 3 minutes and 45 seconds in the urban area and 6 minutes and 11 seconds in rural areas. We've done this while keeping a firm eye on the bottom line.

Over the last 5 years, municipal taxes have been cut once, frozen twice, and increased near the rate of inflation three times – the best record of major cities in Ontario. But reform in property assessment and property tax laws are clearly warranted. That will remain one of my top priorities.

The Decima Survey showed public concern on transportation. Ottawa has spent hundreds of millions of dollars to expand our bus, light rail and road network. Our economy can't prosper if our people and the delivery of goods and services are stuck in traffic. That's why I'm pleased City Council gave 2006 budget approval to the first phase of the work to help fix the Highway 174 split in the east end.

Fixing the "split" is a priority for our city and I will continue to take those concerns to Queen's Park to ensure the provincial government is part of the solution to help alleviate the gridlock now being experienced by east end commuters. Including the proposal for a new Innes-Walkley Road connection to a Hunt Club Road extension and new interchange will also relieve traffic pressure for east end residents and for commuters in Ottawa South.

The Terry Fox extension, a new Castlefrank interchange, Innes Road, Woodroffe Avenue, and Fallowfield Road, are just some of the major road investments we've made. And while we need to invest to upgrade the major spine of our road network, investments in bus and light rail are essential. There are new improved Park and Ride facilities in Kanata, Orleans, and Barrhaven. We'll buy 63 new low-floor buses next year and as mentioned, light rail expansion will begin later this year.

Ottawa is also a safe city. We've hired 181 new police officers over the last three years - and another 180 will be hired over the next two years. Just last week, the City and the Police Services Board announced a new strategy to help reduce gun crimes. This program builds on the millions of dollars the City is investing in our youth and in crime prevention.

This Council's policy is to invest in people. This includes:

- Crime Prevention Ottawa. Membership in this organization includes Dr. Irving Waller, Michael Allen of the United Way, and business and community leader - Barbara Farber;
- The Somali Task Force on Youth;
- 13 Community Houses located throughout our social housing communities. City Council also approved funding for four Youth Outreach workers so that our kids in neighbourhoods such as Michelle Heights and Banff/Ledbury have access to recreational and cultural programming.
- The 2006 budget also provides funding to organizations from every corner of our city, from the Youth Services Bureau to the Osgoode Youth Association.

We need to help our kids in their own neighbourhoods so that the lure of turning to a life of drugs and crime is diminished. Another new initiative is the Integrated Drug Strategy. Through the

Mayor's Office, we have put together a community team comprised of hospital and health care representatives, the Ottawa Police Chief, city officials including Deputy Manager Steve Kanellakos, and other community leaders including David Smith.

The goal of the Integrated Drug Strategy group is to provide action on better prevention, treatment, enforcement and harm reduction initiatives – and to do this by becoming a unified community force.

We need to do more to help our young kids with drug treatment. As the fourth largest city in Canada, I find it unacceptable there is no residential drug rehabilitation centre for our young people who need treatment for an extended period of time. Establishing a new treatment centre with capacity for overnight and extended periods of treatment time must be a priority for this city.

Another reason we enjoy a high quality of life in Ottawa is our people. Just look at how our City and our citizens responded to the plight of the Kashechewan natives. Ottawa provided those families with a warm security blanket while they were away from their homes on the reserve. Credit here should be given to the team headed by John Ashe in our Emergency Measures Office. Just look at how we responded to the United Way Campaign, another record year for donations. Just look at how people responded to the media campaigns for hospital expansion donations.

Our budget continues to underline this Council's commitment to investing in people. The City continues its strong commitment to housing our most vulnerable citizens, and is increasingly looked to as a "best practice" in how to support the community to build affordable housing and deal with homelessness.

In 2005, we implemented progressive "Housing First" policies to ensure that public lands are used to help meet the need for affordable housing in all areas of the city. In 2006, we will be implementing a new way of developing that land via the Ottawa Land Corporation in support of healthy, inclusive communities.

Since 2002, the City has supported the funding and development of 449 units of new low-income housing, including new supportive housing for people with mental illness, and the first new co-op housing developments in the over 10 years since social housing programs were cancelled.

In 2005, we started to see the return of funding for affordable housing from the provincial and federal governments, including approving funding for 136 new units in 4 projects, and we continue to push for a stronger commitment from those orders of government in 2006. These investments have generated over \$74 million in new construction, but more importantly will create over 1,000 decent, safe and affordable places to live.

The Task Force on Homelessness and Safe Streets has been meeting over the past year to hear from people on the streets how to make Ottawa a better place for them to live, and will be reporting back to Council in the next few weeks. Since 2000, the City has helped develop 17 projects for new supportive shelters, transitional and permanent housing for over 400 homeless youth, adults and families.

These projects represent over \$26 million in new development, with over \$20 million in new capital funding from all levels of government. The partners we worked with on these significant projects include: Ottawa Salus Corporation, The John Howard Society, The Elizabeth Fry Society, Youth Services Bureau, The Mission, Ottawa Mennonite Church, Salvation Army, Bruce House, and Cornerstone.

We've also made some dramatic changes to our city-owned 14,000 units of housing. Through the appointment of Ron Larkin and a new Board, the City has addressed some of the long-standing complaints affecting tenants. There is beefed up security and better maintenance. There is also quicker response to building safety complaints. But more importantly, there is a change in attitude from indifference to action. And the changes include involving the tenants in safety programs, recreation and maintenance matters. Our tenants know we are working hard to fix problems and that they are part of the solution.

Our 2006 budget further invests in people by adding 10 new public health staff, including 5 new public health nurses. And there is a new \$11 million investment to create 700 new childcare spaces. Ottawa succeeds because we create community partnerships - whether it is the Task Force on Homelessness or Team Ottawa Gatineau - we have a centre of excellence in creating partnerships that is not exceeded by another city in this country. That partnership extends to our rural residents.

It was a year ago during this State of the City address in which I announced a Rural Summit. Thanks to the efforts of City Manager Kent Kirkpatrick and his team, this city is now building on the reconciliation success of the Rural Summit. I was impressed that all of us - Councillors and rural community leaders - including our harshest critics, put aside any partisanship concerns and kept an open mind in helping to bridge the rural-urban divide.

The Rural Summit Task Force has already made significant progress under Chair, Bob McKinley.

City Council has, in addition to normal budget enhancement ranging from increases to the gravel roads budget and rural cultural projects, designated a special budget allocation of \$1.9 million to the rural initiative.

As a Council, we have been listening. Residents from every part of the city – rural, suburban and urban – have told us they want Ottawa to remain one of the cleanest and greenest cities in North America. Our residents want us to lead on the environment. The 2006 budget provides an additional \$3 million for litter pick up, boulevard maintenance and grass cutting.

Much of that money will be available to community organizations and service clubs that want to take on a beautification project in a particular neighbourhood. In order to reduce landfill use and reduce greenhouse gases, City Council approved a plasma waste conversion demonstration project. That plant will use high heat to turn garbage into electricity and the reusable solid can be used for road material. We also have a facility to convert landfill methane gas into enough electric power to service 5,000 homes under construction at the same site.

In addition, an organics green bin pick-up program will be in place in 2008. The city just introduced the energy efficient Smart Car in the bylaw fleet. There will be a decision to purchase hybrid buses or hybrid-type buses later this year. I will also push to make Project Porchlight a citywide initiative. Project Porchlight started out in Ottawa South where at last count, one free energy efficient light bulb was handed out to more than 13,000 homes.

The City has adopted a green policy for its own buildings and one for the public. City Council's decision to waive development charges for brownfields clean-up paved the way for a new energy efficient building called "The Currents" in Westboro. The Windmill Developments building will use less water, less energy and smart building technologies. This development at Wellington and Holland is also the new home of the Great Canadian Theatre Company, which brings us to Council's commitment to the arts.

City Council committed \$1.3 million for the GCTC project. City Council committed \$6 million for a new concert hall. And as mentioned earlier, we've committed funding through a Triple Project for

the Orleans Arts facility. In addition, we've invested \$700,000 for the Museum Sustainability Fund. And last October, City Hall was transformed into a new gallery through the first Annual Mayor's Art Festival. More than 400 artists submitted applications to show their works.

Serving our residents better no matter where they live in our city is achieved through accountability and transparency of our city government. City Manager Kent Kirkpatrick has implemented a number of changes that have won the praise of community leaders—including those in business who called for simpler reporting of financial documents. We now have a multi-year strategic plan that provides a roadmap of City Council's priorities and change agenda for the next four years. We are now building a Performance Measurement Index so that residents will have an annual snapshot of how we're meeting our priorities.

Members of the public have also commented favourably on the changes to the budget format. We implemented an easy to remember telephone number (3-1-1) for residents who want to call in for service and information. We've broken new ground with the set up of a municipal, federal and provincial government one-stop service counter at Ottawa City Hall. So, whether you need information for a municipal building permit, your provincial health card or applying for federal social insurance, you can do it through the joint counters at City Hall. That's an example of all levels of government working together to better serve taxpayers.

The City now releases an Annual Report that captures where and how the city spent your tax dollars. These measures don't grab the headlines, but the Corporate Plan will ensure the city remains true to its goal of delivering government services efficiently.

As your Mayor, I am committed to removing and preventing barriers to accessibility, for Ottawa's residents and employees. There is much to be proud of - the City has achieved a lot this past year. Here are just a few achievements and initiatives that have been introduced:

- *Accessibility and Inclusion Day*, which I first proclaimed in 2004, was hosted by the City of Ottawa in partnership with CTV Ottawa and Voiceprint Canada. CTV Ottawa is now an active partner with the City in delivering accessibility messages to the community.
- 5 years ago, we didn't have any accessible taxicabs. Today, we have 25 and there are more to come.
- A Corporate Accessibility Specialist was hired in 2005 to ensure that the City meets its legislated obligations.
- More than 2,000 barriers were removed and close to 150 city buildings were audited in 2005 for accessibility.
- A self-identification survey was conducted and indicated that persons with disabilities represented 5.3% of OC Transpo staff, which compares favourably to the national average of 5.1%.
- Ottawa Public Library and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind partnered on the VISUNET program to extend services to individuals who are print disabled.
- 17 new and/or reconstructed intersections were equipped with audible devices in 2005 as part of the Audible Signal Program.
- 112 new low-floor accessible vehicles have been added to our transit fleet, resulting in a fleet that is 62% accessible.
- On November 29, 2005, the City tabled its third Municipal Accessibility Plan, which continues its efforts to further its commitment in identifying, removing and preventing barriers – including highlighting new and future initiatives. This brings Ottawa into full compliance with the Province's Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. And the provincial government has acknowledged Ottawa as the leading city in Ontario for accessibility.

I started this speech by talking about quality of life and how a number of statistics and surveys rated Ottawa among the best. But our quality of life is not best measured by surveys and statistics. It is measured by:

- the Bell Sensplex designing an award winning ice surface to accommodate our sledge hockey teams for persons with disabilities;
- the smiles and emotions of over 6,000 10 and 11 year old children participating in the world's largest minor hockey tournament right here in Ottawa;
- the contributions by individuals and businesses of over \$1.5 million per week to Ottawa charities;
- the coming together in partnership of our faith communities in Interfaith Ottawa and standing together at our Human Rights Monument against hatred and persecution;
- the excitement of opening night at Orpheus Theatre, The Ottawa Symphony Orchestra, Opera Lyra, any of our festivals, or the inclusion of artists with disabilities in the Mayor's City Hall Art Festival;
- having a Police Service that is the model of employment equity in Canada;
- media leaders who leave their microphones, cameras and pens at their offices and help make Ottawa the volunteer capital of Canada.

This can only happen with community leadership at every level and this is what makes Ottawa one of the most liveable cities in the world. And this progress is significantly enhanced by the hard work and commitment of our City Councillors, our City Manager and our employees.

Our quality of life is high. Our economy is buoyant. The City is strong. We will work hard to ensure this progress continues.

Thank you