

// **CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY** //

Good afternoon and thank you for the invitation to speak with you today

I begin by recognizing the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations in whose traditional territories we live and work.....

“Welcome”

“Hay swx qa”

For the short time I have been your Mayor, I have had the great pleasure to meet and learn from so many of you here today

And I have come to realise that in the end

we **share** a vision for this City .

I don't think that vision is a secret

It's of a vibrant and safe Victoria.

A city that is full of opportunities.

The best city in Canada to work, live and play.

A place where young people can start and raise a family,

And start and build a career.

Where everyone can afford to rent or buy a home.

A city, that gains strength from its diverse neighbourhoods and communities.

A city that supports its downtown.

Where you can start, build, and sustain a business.

In the end,

A city that is Canada's social and environmental leader.

Ultimately – a City, that is **not** known for its challenges,
but for the compassionate and creative ideas
used to tackle those challenges

(pause)

Now – Victoria is only as strong as the region it is part of...

And my motto continues to be – if it's good for the region, it's good for Victoria

So needless to say – **our** vision for Victoria is also **our** vision for Greater Victoria

And as a City and a region we are doing wonderful things –

growing and thriving, improving and innovating.

As we explore and tackle the challenges ahead, let us remember to celebrate our successes –

(pause)

Sometimes I step back , and I just look around

We live in a truly stunning part of the country -

And now we are not the only ones who know this little secret of ours

Recently MoneySense Magazine named Victoria as the most liveable City in Canada,

because we have the right mix of economic and community strength.

This is outstanding news – and it reflects the entire region

With our exceptional people, unique businesses, remarkable architecture, and stunning landscapes

We are truly blessed

But there is still much we have to invest in - together

We are all part of a team –

As Ben Franklin said during the revolutionary war – “We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately”

The context of today may be different – but the idea is the same

As a team we need to be ready to tackle the challenges ahead , if we are going to be successful

There are challenges ahead – serious ones.....

Municipalities are shouldering more and more responsibilities,

our taxpayers and our region are in uncertain economic times,

.....we are facing complex urban issues....

And there are no easy answers or quick fixes

(pause)

We have to be brave enough to ask the questions

and wise enough to listen to the advice and guidance that is offered.

....that way we can all learn from one another and move forward with confidence, expertise and excellence

(pause)

Recently Victoria City Council put out its top priorities for the next few months

Council - which I am honoured to a part of – worked collectively to identify the areas of focus in an effort to stay on track and see results

Among those priorities were:

Homelessness - because moving people off the streets and into to homes is vital to the health of our people and the health our businesses

Increasing affordable housing - because we need to be able to attract people to the region,

Supporting a vibrant downtown - because a healthy downtown is necessary to a healthy economy

And while these items are presented in a list – they should really be presented in a circle with arrows pointing and connecting each other

All of these priorities work together to make this City the best it can be

I want to explore these priorities today – to fill you in where we are at.

Now, there is no question what the number one issue is in our city –

it is homelessness

[pause]

I have spoken in many places and many times about what homelessness is and how it is a cause that is just

However today, with members of the business community, let me touch on what many of you know better than anyone

That homelessness strikes at the heart of our ability to build a city that sustains the economy and supports the community

There are many elements of the homelessness crisis that are visible – but there are also many that are hidden

It is the silent cost when a family avoids coming downtown for a movie or dinner

Or when a visitor decides not to return

It is the silent cost when a business invests someplace else - giving the jobs and wealth to others

It is the diminishing of our city life that reduces the mix and flow of people that give great cities their cultural identity

Homelessness affects all aspects of our City - our residents, our businesses, our downtown, our service providers, our health care system....

And I am committed to putting an end to it

In 1965 Lester B. Pearson said:

...it is “the necessity for everybody to have a decent dwelling; not to make all homes mansions, but to ensure that none of them will be hovels. It is only a very rare soul that can expand in a hovel. This objective of decent housing simply has to be achieved in our democratic society.”

More than four decades later – I couldn’t agree more....

Now - the Premier has asked municipalities to find land for social housing.... and Victoria is doing just that.....

But this is not just an issue for Victoria – it is an issue for Greater Victoria – and so I invite and encourage all municipalities to join in the effort

The people who come to live on the streets of Victoria come from across all municipalities, the province, and the country

And we need commitment and leadership from all levels of government to put an end to homelessness

Working through the coordinated efforts of the Coalition to End Homelessness, we are starting to see progress

I am honoured to be the co-chair along with the Honourable Ted Hughes

And I applaud the efforts of all the partners who have come to the table –

the Vancouver Island Health Authority, BC Housing, the United Way,

the business community, service providers and individuals

that all dedicate so much time and energy to this cause

Just last week the Coalition released some interesting numbers

600 people have been housed in the last 18 months by our partners – and 400 of them remain in their home.

Looking deeper into this number we learn that the follow up supports provided to people in need are so important

And I want to be clear why this investment in housing and supports is vital

It is because the costs of managing homelessness are staggering

It is estimated that we spend \$50,000 a year per person living on the streets

With our current homeless population – that is over \$60 million dollars a year

That includes the cost of policing, hospitals and emergency room visits, clean-up and more.....and then add in the silent costs

So for the dollars we invest in housing and supports, we save money elsewhere

We save money and improve people's lives and the community around us

Now - Lets talk affordable housing.

We are actively moving in partnership to create affordable rental housing

We recently announced a very exciting project,

that saw the City, BC Housing, Pacifica and Townline work together to build the first purpose built rental building in more than 30 years...

We are using a similar model with Dockside Green for another 46 affordable rental homes

And we are looking for more opportunities

That kind of innovation is necessary if we are going to make a dent in the housing crunch this region, is experiencing

The secondary suite initiative is another example of what the City is doing – partnering with home owners to create housing

We can invest a small amount of money and see big returns

(pause)

We are investing in housing , because it is the right thing to do

And because it is about keeping our citizens and our communities healthy and safe

(pause)

Healthy and safe communities –

One of our communities that needs our attention right now is our downtown

As far as I am concerned – solving homelessness and the affordable housing crisis will go a long way to addressing some of the challenges facing our downtown businesses

But it is not homelessness alone, that is impacting local businesses ability to thrive - there many other challenges at work

One we have been hearing a lot about lately is the disorder occurring late at night – an issue that in fact has little or nothing to do with homelessness

street crowding after bars close;

fighting; vandalism;

lack of late night transportation;

public urination; street noise;

and community nuisance caused by excessive drinking

this kind of behaviour would not be tolerated in any other community – and it will not be tolerated in our downtown community

This “disorder” is causing deep hardship on local businesses – and I am tired of it

we are all very tired of it.

I am tired of hearing about businesses having to deal with broken windows or graffiti

I am tired of people not understanding the impact of their actions

I am tired of our police being diverted away from other needs to deal with street fights induced by excessive drinking

I am tired of hearing people say they don't feel safe downtown at night

With the help of many of you here today – it is time to work together to tackle these late night issues

It is time -

the Late Night Downtown Task Force is ready to begin its work -

we start today

The late night issues we are experiencing are not new – and they have been canvassed time and time again...

So now it is time for short, sharp and focused actions....

For police, for bars and businesses, for taxis and buses, for residents and visitors

For all stakeholders – it is time for action.

It is my intention to be sharp and focused in this endeavour

And that is what I ask of those of you who will be part of this effort

Myself, Councillor Charlayne Thornton-Joe and the Chief of Police Jamie Graham will make up the task force –

We will actively engage the many stakeholders who are part of the solution

- what are the problems
- what are the solutions
- and what is your role in putting those solutions into action

We all have a role to play – we are all responsible for making the downtown safe and welcoming – all hours of the day and night

And I have every expectation that we will meet the goal of finding lasting solutions to the challenges we face

We must move swiftly and efficiently on this task ahead

And together we can balance the needs of business, residents, visitors while having a thriving downtown and a healthy night life that everyone can participate in

Our downtown serves this entire region – it is not just Victoria’s downtown, it is everyone’s downtown

There are so many wonderful venues and events that happen every night – let’s make them welcoming for everyone.

(pause)

Now - we also need to make sure we are nurturing our downtown and business community all the time – not just at night...

One thing I think we can all agree on is that to have a just society

we must have a vibrant economy

No successful society anywhere is possible without the energy, vision, and passion of a successful business community

We are in tough economic times – and our residents and business community are working overtime to get through this rough patch

I commend the efforts of the Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development Agency and the Downtown Victoria Business Association for all that you and your members do to support and grow our local economy

You are valuable partners to the region

I recently had the great and informative pleasure of attending a mayors summit on the economy hosted by the Economic Development Agency

It was an important exercise for me – and I left that room with a deep understanding of the contribution local business and industries make to our overall health and vitality....

And what struggles they are facing

What was reinforced at that summit, was that without our local businesses and home-grown industries our City, and our region, would be in big trouble

So - how can the city be your partner in making Victoria , Canada's best city to work and play

We sponsor events, like the coming launch of the Olympic Torch Relay in an effort to bring more people to our stunning region

We foster a city that is attractive to families and people seeking a high quality of life

And we try to maintain a taxation system that is fair, and balances the provision of high quality core services while meeting the constant demand for new services.

For this year the City of Victoria have just announced an overall tax increase of 4.84%

But we also adjusted the tax ratios this year

First thing we did, was to lower the industrial tax ratio to match the business ratio

This adjustment represents a 15% reduction for the light industrial and a 30% reduction for major industrial class.

This move brings Victoria in line with the many municipalities that no longer differentiate between business, light industrial and major industrial

It is an important step to creating a level playing field

Further, we lowered the business tax ratio slightly

Now - I know that for some businesses the drop represents only a few hundred dollars in savings

But without the conscious choice to address that ratio, it tends to creep upward

And we don't want it to creep up – but instead to track downward

I think of our tax dollars as an investment in our city that in turn creates the conditions for successful businesses

My commitment as your mayor is to find the right balance

Because that balance is vital as we improve services and prioritize competing needs

(Pause)

Needs -

One of the needs is the much spoken about “infrastructure deficit” facing this region and municipalities across the country

From bridges to pools, to sewers to lamp posts – from ships to planes - we have a lot of work to do.

But we have a strong capital plan to address these needs – and thanks to the outstanding work and planning of our staff we are keeping up with that plan

Now – we have a big project ahead of us – the replacement of Big Blue

Just a few weeks ago Council moved forward in principal on the replacement of the Johnson Street Bridge

Knowing the state of the current bridge, the ballpark costs of rehab or replacement, the shifting needs of our residents and the region –

Council decided replacement is the best option –

Included in that is the realignment of the approaches to the bridge

And for any new structure to be architecturally significant and to include the rail line, and safe bike lanes and pedestrian crossings

Because we need to think about how future generations may travel in and out of the downtown

With those considerations in mind we have just submitted our grant request to the federal government

– and we are lobbying hard to ensure that the provincial and federal governments will partner with us

And I think they will – because one thing that we are stressing is that while this project is “shovel ready” – more importantly, it is “shovel worthy”

The replacement of the Blue Bridge is vital for the safety of our citizens and the needs of a growing and thriving region.

I want to be clear – the Blue Bridge is our number one infrastructure project – it is shovel worthy!

Municipalities across the country have been starved for partnership dollars for years – and Victoria is certainly not alone in trying to take full advantage of the money starting to flow from Ottawa

Big projects and big dollars requests are coming in from all over the country –

So all of us need to work to make sure this region is on the radar

We all have projects in the queue

We all have top priorities

And we can work to make sure this region is not left out

Again – at the end of the day what is good for the region is good for the city of Victoria

This region has a wealth of talent, strong leadership, and opportunity

And by working together we will realize that potential

I have been truly honoured to work with my counter parts across the region – their commitment to their constituents is undeniable

There is one common understanding - that none of our constituents are solely our own –

they are all traveling between municipalities on a daily basis

Accessing services, playing in parks, shopping and visiting friends and family

We have an obligation to support each other, because that is how we can best support our citizens

We might be on an island, but we do not exist in isolation from one another

(pause)

In conclusion, maintaining Victoria as the best place in Canada to work, live and play will depend on our ability to match the potential of our economy with the depth of our social justice

Investing in our businesses - and ourselves - is the way to build a sustainable city.

There are opportunities all around us - we are on the brink of moving from a provincial capital to a world-class city

I want to stress that this has been an amazing few months for me as Mayor.

I have a great team of Councilors at the table with me – and I count myself lucky to work with them every day

I am having fun, learning a lot, and we are moving forward on key priorities that will make our communities, our downtown, our City and our region better.

My commitment to you is simple –

Each year I will be accountable to you and will demonstrate all we have accomplished and where we still have work to do.

I will be honest about the challenges - and the opportunities we face

And I will be upfront and clear about why we made the decisions we did.

I look forward to working with all of you so that Victoria always remains “full of life”.

Thank you