

Speaking Notes
for
Mayor Richard Stewart

2008 Inaugural Council Meeting
“A Time of Action & Celebration”

Monday, December 1, 2008

7:00 p.m.

Council Chambers

Final

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Thank you. Merci. I am honoured to welcome all of you to Coquitlam's 2008 Inaugural Council meeting. C'est vraiment mon plaisir de vous accueillir et de vous souhaiter un bonsoir.

I'd first like to introduce our new Council. Their seating position has been set by draw, but I'll do this in order of their length of service:

Councillor Lou Sekora, who has served this community for many years as School Trustee, Councillor, and Mayor;

Councillor Mae Reid, who also brings with her many years of service on council – she started a lot younger than Lou did. She brings strong knowledge of real estate, and a lot of passion about issues like Riverview and animal care;

Councillor Fin Donnelly, who is well-known for his work on environmental issues, particularly related to our streams;

Councillor Barrie Lynch, a registered parliamentarian and ambulance paramedic, with a strong knowledge of governance issues;

Councillor Brent Asmundson drives through our community every day for his work, and as a result knows a lot about transit and transportation issues;

Councillor Doug Macdonell, a former RCMP, who has been deeply involved at all levels in amateur sport in our city;

And a special welcome to our two new Councillors: **Councillor Linda Reimer**, with a background in banking and real estate, a member of the College of Teachers, and former president of DPAC;

And **Councillor Selina Robinson**, Director of Development for SHARE Family and Community Services, who works every day with Tri-Cities organizations on some of our most pressing social issues.

The voters of Coquitlam have elected a Council with a diversity of views, a diversity of backgrounds, and a shared interest in supporting and improving this community.

Let me say it right up front. Diversity is good. We should celebrate diversity. And I'll say a bit more about that later.

Tonight, I want to speak mostly about the future. But first, I think it's important to review what we've accomplished these past few years.

Tonight, I'd like to acknowledge several people who have made significant contributions to our City. I want to begin with outgoing Mayor Maxine Wilson, who has spent 20 years in public life, on School Board and, beginning in 1998, here on City Council. In fact, when Maxine ran for Council in 1998, she asked me to design her brochure, which I was glad to do. Maxine's commitment to this city has always been strong, and I'd like to thank her on behalf of City Council, and to wish her well.

I also want to acknowledge Councillor Neal Nicholson, who has indicated that he is taking a three-year hiatus from Council in preparation for our next election in 2011. During his time on Council, Neal provided input that was reasoned and deliberate. He and I often

joked that we found ourselves in agreement more often than either of us cared to admit. Neal has a long history of public service, for which I'd like to sincerely thank him on behalf of my colleagues.

I'd also like to express Council's appreciation to the many citizens who sat on advisory committees, participated in planning sessions, and offered their input and vision for the future of this city.

And finally, I want to say something about the people who make this city work, our employees. This city has some of the finest employees I've ever worked with. These are the people who protect us from crime and from fire, who design our neighbourhoods, who tend our parks, who run programs for our youth, our seniors. It's also the people who work a bit more behind-the-scenes, making sure the water flows, and the drains drain, and the roads get us where we're going.

I worked for 20 years as a City of Coquitlam employee, beginning as a lifeguard in 1976. My mother was also a longtime City employee, both in Parks and Recreation, and in Engineering. I know a great many of our employees personally, I've met some of them at midnight as they're trouble-shooting a plumbing problem, and I know that the whole team is made up of dedicated and hardworking people. I want to take this time to acknowledge them for all they do for our citizens.

So what has this team of people accomplished? Well, it's truly an enormous list that includes our award-winning Active Coquitlam program, the opening of Glen Pine Pavilion 50+ centre (which I get to join next year), the opening of the new Chimo Pool, and the start of construction of the Sports Centre Renewal project.

We're nearing completion of the Town Centre Sports Field Complex, and we've already hosted a major international event at the site. The World U19 Lacrosse Championships this past summer welcomed teams from Japan and Australia, Europe and the Caribbean, and really set the bar for the kinds of sport tourism we'll be able to generate for this city in the future.

Coquitlam has also been named one of the Cultural Capitals of Canada for 2009. This Federal government program celebrates our diversity – I mentioned this earlier.

Diversity is something to be celebrated, and Coquitlam is an enormously diverse community. In my opinion, it's truly one of the best things about this community. That's why I pushed so hard for the reestablishment of the Multiculturalism Advisory Committee, because I want our many cultures to play key roles, inclusive roles, in the life of our city. We have some amazing festivals and cultural celebrations in Coquitlam, and this coming year you'll want to participate in all of them. From Korean Heritage Days, to the Scottish Highland Games, from Chinese New Year to our Persian community's celebrations, you can tour the world right here in Coquitlam.

One significant part of the Cultural Capital of Canada celebrations is a series of events to commemorate the 100th Birthday of Maillardville, the community I grew up in.

The French-speaking community of Maillardville formed part of the early foundations of our city. Now, as this community celebrates its centennial, it is poised for new growth and revitalization.

The community is planning major celebrations throughout the year in 2009 – and they will be hosting the Francophone Village for the 2010 Games.

Nous préparons pour célébrer le 100e anniversaire de notre communauté francophone, Maillardville, et pour accueillir le monde au Village de la Francophonie pour les Jeux Olympiques en 2010.

I notice some of our Maillardville pioneers are in the room tonight, including at least one of my former scout leaders. Coquitlam has been talking about the revitalization of Maillardville for decades. Over the past couple of years, we've been engaging residents and businesses in discussions regarding the future plans for Maillardville and the Southwest Area, including the significant Gateway transportation project, and the redevelopment of Fraser Mills. Maillardville indeed has a bright future.

Of course, there is lots more that has been accomplished, and many other things on the plate for the coming year, such as getting underway with construction of the Evergreen Line. This is more than just a valued new transit option, it also presents tremendous opportunities for transit oriented growth that looks at higher densities and commercial and mixed-use development.

That said, I should take a moment to discuss the economic reality we now face across the world. We fully anticipate that things will be slowing down quite dramatically in the coming year.

The financial crisis in the US has affected the entire world in ways that a year ago were unimaginable; we need to recognize that Coquitlam won't be immune from those challenges.

We're going to have to deal with some difficult fiscal realities in the coming year. As part of this, it's particularly important this year that we've set aside some additional time to consider our budget.

Departments have been asked to re-assign priorities within their existing budgets so that they can address emerging needs without additional costs.

And we'll undoubtedly make increased calls upon our very diligent, award-winning Financial Management team as we work our way through those challenges.

Even with these efforts, we recognize that some of our major cost drivers generally exceed increases in the cost of living. This means we need to focus on how to maintain service levels while carefully monitoring spending, all while recognizing that our revenues from growth will be lower.

One thing we'll have to work even harder at is to do what we can to support business and attract jobs – even in a tough economic environment. In updating Coquitlam's Economic Development Strategy, we need to draw on expertise from a number of sources, including

economists, marketing experts and our business community. The goal is more local jobs, both for a strong business tax base, and so that fewer of our residents will have to commute out of the City to go to work.

We also need to streamline our services for business development. We need to continue to improve the turnaround time for application reviews, permits and licensing, so that we can be more responsive to the needs of those who would want to create jobs in our community. I want Coquitlam to be the easiest place in BC to create a job.

We will also need to reach out more to business across BC, Canada and the world. The launch of QNet, a wholly-owned company, is intended to take advantage of investments in fibre optic cable made by previous councils, and make us a more competitive place to do business. We also need to explore ways to improve Coquitlam's connections with the rest of the world, through strategic alliances, twinings, and other initiatives.

Together, these and other measures will help to position Coquitlam to ride out this economic downturn, and to assist our residents and businesses to weather the storm as well.

As we confirm the new Council here tonight, we're beginning a three-year term -- about 1,000 days. And there is a lot we want to accomplish in that time.

What I'd like to do now is, together with Council, focus on the next 100 days. Basically, the 100-day Action Plan outlines some things I'd like to see us achieve as we begin this term; I hope it will assist in guiding Council and staff so that we can have a productive Council term.

Governance & Team Building

To be successful, I believe our most important role as a Council will be to build a strong team – through both effective leadership and strategic partnerships.

While I know that there will obviously be differences of opinion, I also know that a solid foundation of trust and respect can result in a City Council that performs better.

We've already made some improvements through changes to Meeting procedures and approvals. And I want to continue to review – with Council – our meeting procedures, our Meeting schedule, Committee structure and other agenda items, to ensure we are working efficiently and effectively.

Over the next 100 days, one of first items we will be reviewing is the Committee structure, including Standing Committees and Advisory Committees.

Strategic Partnerships

I also want us to do more to develop strategic partnerships. Coquitlam is one of the largest cities in BC, and it's important for us to have a strong voice in the region and the province. To do this, we need to build on existing partnerships and foster strong relationships with community stakeholders, neighbours and other levels of government.

Over the next few months, I plan to meet with key federal and provincial representatives, as well as with our municipal neighbours, to discuss the projects and planning underway in our community.

These working relationships will be critical to the success of projects like the Evergreen Line, Gateway, and the kinds of infrastructure improvements we need over the next decade.

Strategic Plan & Business Planning

You can expect to hear from us regularly over the next few months, as Council seeks your input on the updates to our Strategic Plan, Business Plan and Economic Development Strategy.

Financial Planning & Facilities

We'll be using these strategic documents, and the input we've received from our community this past year, as the foundation for the decision-making process for our budget. It will also include a detailed review of our facility inventory and the growing list of demands for expanding or adding new facilities. We'll be holding a facility workshop to focus specifically on this challenge, and to develop a long-term plan. I want this plan to include measures to green our existing buildings, as well as standards for the improved energy-efficiency of all the city's facilities.

As I mentioned earlier, the financial planning process is going to be taking place into the New Year. This is a change from three years ago, when newly-elected councillors were given only a few days to dig into the city's massive \$200-million budget, before having to pass our financial plan. By extending this process this year, it will give us more time to carefully review the budget before making final decisions.

Planning & Development

We'll also be connecting with our residents and businesses in the Maillardville and Austin Heights neighbourhoods as we move forward with updates to their neighbourhood plans.

Leisure & Parks

As our province hosts the 2010 Olympics and Paralympics, Coquitlam will be offering a number of opportunities to celebrate the Games here in our community. So we'll be working closely with our local organizations and neighbours in the days ahead as we make plans to host both the Francophone Village and the Torch Relay celebration event.

Engineering & Public Works

We're also focusing on some of our core services. For example, this year we will find a workable solution to the collection of solid waste and recycling. We're working to finalize the King Edward Overpass alignment as part of the Gateway project. And we'll be working on the more detailed design work for the Evergreen Line – such as station locations and alignment options.

In addition, there will continue to be a focus on transportation improvements within our community – including safety, capacity and road rehabilitation projects.

Public Safety

Public safety is another top priority for our residents, and we're making strides. For example, the Coquitlam RCMP continue to implement their successful Crime Reduction Strategy. But statistics don't tell all; at an event just last night, Superintendent Peter Lepine made the observation that, regardless of what the statistics tell us, if a resident doesn't feel safe in her neighbourhood, then the resident is right. We have to keep working to make sure all our residents feel safe.

As part of this, in the first 100 days, I want us to look at options to address undesirable business types in our neighbourhoods. And we will be reviewing the Public Safety Inspection Team program, aimed at grow-ops.

The focus on public safety as a priority has also resulted in the hiring of more RCMP members – and we're working with the City of Port Coquitlam to see how we can address the need for additional space.

This need for office space is also affecting Fire/Rescue, following the addition of new firefighters. We now must address the need for both expanded administration space, and new Fire Halls in the growing areas of our city.

So you can see that it's going to be a very busy few months.

This is an exciting time. We are facing a new beginning, but are building on an excellent foundation. I know we can build something great for you in 2009 and over the next three years.

So, I'll close with a few thank yous of my own. I want to thank my family, who have given me much support over the past months and years; they're all here tonight. I also want to thank all the campaign workers and supporters who came together with a goal and accomplished it. And I want to thank the people of Coquitlam for this opportunity, this challenge, for their trust. Merci beaucoup.

I know my fellow Council members share my commitment to improving this wonderful community, and I would like to invite each of them to say a few words tonight to help commemorate this inaugural meeting.