

State of the Municipality
Mayor Peter Kelly
June 18, 2009
Westin Hotel

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you Robert for that kind introduction and thanks everyone for taking the time out of your schedules to be here today. I want to start by congratulating our Premier designate, Darrell Dexter, who in approximately 24 hours from now will become the first NDP Premier of Nova Scotia.

I look forward to working with the new Premier and his team and wish them all the best as they tackle a challenging job at a challenging time.

This annual event provides me with an opportunity to discuss the challenges we have overcome, the issues we still face, and the vision we share for moving forward.

So, ladies and gentlemen I would ask that you join me now in thanking the people who are responsible for bringing us together to listen, to learn and to share: Valerie Payne and the staff and volunteers at the Halifax Chamber of Commerce.

Under Board Chair Bruce Russell, the Chamber leads by example. The Chamber provides leadership on many subjects, and leadership is something I would like to focus on this afternoon.

A lot of events have taken place over the past 12 months, most notably the world economic crisis and the unified efforts of governments from around the world to lessen its effects on business and individuals.

But not everyone seems to be feeling the full effects of this slowdown. In fact, I was recently at a meeting of big city mayors and during a working group session a blackberry began to ring on the table where a group of us were seated.

One of my colleagues from another city answered and quickly said, "Yes I can talk," which immediately got our attention.

The mayor then proceeded to say, "\$50,000 for new furniture? That sounds fair, go ahead." We all smiled.

He then continued, "\$3,000,000 for an addition to City Hall if we act now... go for it!" he said. We all tried to look terribly unimpressed.

The final straw came when he said, "I like the idea for all new transit infrastructure and \$20,000,000 seems like a steal. Tell them to go ahead and tell them to take it all out of

this year's budget." Now we were all getting a tad envious at this point but we acted cool and after the call ended we continued on with our conversation.

At the break though I had to know what his secret was for being able to have so much disposable revenue at a time of economic crisis.

He looked me strait in the eye and said, "It was easy... that wasn't my phone."

It would be terrific if in business or in our personal lives we could all just sign a blank cheque and have everything that we want, but that is not the case. We have to live within our means and budget and plan carefully to ensure that we can meet economic challenges.

At a meeting of big city mayors one of my colleagues came up to me to say how lucky I was to live in and be mayor of a municipality like HRM. He thought I was lucky because as he put it; we have stable housing prices, a good quality of life, access to some of the best medical facilities in the country, some of the best educational resources in North America, home to Canada's East Coast Navy, and some of the finest entrepreneurial minds anywhere.

Everything this individual said was right. We are all proud of the fact that we can live the big city life while still enjoying the benefits of a small town.

While we face many challenges, like any other city, the biggest challenge facing everyone is the state of the global economy. In this regard, I am happy to report the state of our region is very strong.

While the province of Ontario shed 60,000 jobs last quarter, our municipality can report an increase of over 3,000 jobs. While every region of North America is contracting, Halifax and Regina lead all cities in North America in job growth when measured by total jobs and full-time jobs created. This is in large measure due to having good government and leadership from Council and also from having a good solid business community many of whom are present here today.

In fact, the Report on Business section of the Globe and Mail reported on Monday just how well Nova Scotia and in particular, Halifax has done over the past year not only to weather the storm but also to take advantage of potential opportunities.

HRM has been able to survive the economic downturn because we as a community and as a Council have taken a long term approach to our planning and our finances.

Living within our means, with the support of the Chamber, has allowed us to have our fiscal house in order. We were not over extended going into this economic crisis and therefore we have the economic flexibility to maneuver through these tough times.

Consecutive balanced budgets, steadily increasing capital budgets, and a long term commitment to fiscal responsibility has put HRM in a strong economic position.

We have heard the words of the Chamber, we have listened to our business community and to our residents of HRM and we shall continue our efforts to grow the Halifax economy, live within our means and provide every advantage possible for our residents, and business community through strong leadership.

It is our commitment to fiscal responsibility and prudent planning which has allowed HRM to support capital spending on projects like the Central Library which will add a new, dynamic hub for social and cultural activity in HRM.

Additional investments in community centres for Prospect Road, Dartmouth East and Fall River are not only focal points for these communities they are the lifeblood of community identity and individuality.

All of these things are doable, as well, the new 40 million dollar quad-plex is being planned with contributions from the Federal and provincial governments as well as the 41.5 million dollar Canada Games Centre which is under construction.

These things are possible because we made the tough choices. We have planned for these expenditures and we will be able to do more because we have been disciplined in our approach to our budget.

Strategic investments in infrastructure have given HRM a solid base for business and individuals to access HRM and to move goods and products to markets.

Our expanded and improved transit system, with the addition of The Link has been paying dividends not only for our citizens but also our environment.

In order for business like yours to thrive in our municipality and in this province we must maintain and expand our infrastructure. Air, rail, road and container traffic represent the backbone of our economy. The Atlantic gateway initiative will create a transportation and economic hub for businesses right here in HRM.

Many companies have come here not only because we have a good educated and skillful workforce, but more importantly they relocate here because they are impressed by our strategic geographic location and close proximity to major North American and European markets. Imagine how much more we will be able to do as we move toward becoming the leader in transportation infrastructure for Eastern Canada.

When asked about the qualities required to be a politician, Churchill said; "The ability to foretell what is going to happen tomorrow, next week, next month and next year. And to have the ability afterwards to explain why it didn't happen."

As the mayor of HRM I enjoy many privileges and many responsibilities. One of those responsibilities is to lead in challenging times. The situation with the Harbour Solutions project is one of these challenging situations.

I have admitted that I have not handled the communication about the Harbour Solutions malfunction well and for that I apologize.

The residents of HRM invested hundreds of millions of dollars into this facility. It was built largely on-time and within budget.

We all took great pride in what we had accomplished and so we should have. Our harbour is the greatest natural resource we have and what happened to the facility is unfortunate.

As mayor, I am accepting full responsibility and as such I will do everything in my power to see that this plant is fully operational as soon as possible, working with all stakeholders.

HRM staff, along with consultants and Halifax Water, is assessing the damage and will make recommendations as to the equipment which needs to be replaced and/or repaired to make the facility fully operational.

I won't deny that this is a bitter disappointment for me, Council, and for all residents

I and Council have made it very clear to staff they are to use any means at their disposal (excuse the pun!) to get this facility fully operational in a timely manner while ensuring we protect the interests of taxpayers.

In the meantime, the Dartmouth Treatment facility continues to treat flows since coming online in July 2008, and the Herring Cove facility will be operational in the commissioning phase later this summer.

Despite this recent setback, we have to remember the outstanding water quality achieved last year with just the Halifax plant in operation.

The improvements continued with the Dartmouth facility and we anticipate further improvements once Herring Cove is on line and operational.

We've seen what the Harbour Solutions project can do. And it will do so again. I am extremely confident that the Halifax Wastewater Treatment facility will be restored and put back into operation. The beaches at Black Rock and Dingle Park **will** reopen as they did last year and I look forward to you joining me again for a swim in the Harbour.

Our environment is the one thing we are guaranteed to pass on to our children. The residents of HRM have chosen to be responsible stewards of our environment and we

will pass on an environment that includes a clean harbour which will continue to be the economic and social backbone of our great municipality.

As Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw once said:

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the community, and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can.

I want to take a few minutes to talk about community and what it means to be a community. Last week we remembered the tragic fires which took place one year ago in the Porter's Lake/Lake Echo and Mineville area. The horror, sadness and loss were only matched by the selfless, at times heroic actions of countless volunteers and emergency crews who responded not only from HRM but across Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada.

Again this year, we saw the devastating effects of fire as the communities of Spryfield, Purcell's Cove and Herring Cove were engulfed in flames.

Once again, neighbours came to the aid of neighbours, communities came to the aid of communities, and we as a family within the HRM came together to help one another. This is what it means to be a true community ladies and gentlemen and I want to thank each and every person who gave of themselves in helping the broader community. Thank you all!

But residents are becoming concerned that we are losing our small town feel.

Violence in our city is a serious issue for the residents of HRM and it is an issue I have been addressing and will continue to address as long as I am mayor.

We established the Mayor's Roundtable on Violence in the HRM.

Last year we released Dr. Don Clairmont's Report to the Mayor's Roundtable and I am proud that significant action has been taken.

Under the leadership of Chief Beazley and the Halifax Regional Police Commission, we are rapidly implementing Dr. Clairmont's recommendations.

One of the most significant recommendations was the establishment of a Public Safety Officer. Superintendent Don Spicer has taken up the challenge and he is tasked with implementing the recommendations.

Although we acknowledge that violent crime is up slightly. Over the past 4 years crime in HRM has been on the decline.

We are not where we want to be. There are examples of gang related, violent acts occurring in our municipality and many of them are taking place in broad day light and in residential areas.

This is unacceptable!

Not only do we need a local strategy, we need a national strategy as well. This is why I have led the charge, along with my colleagues on Big City Mayors, on a campaign to Ottawa to express our concern and need for immediate action on violent crime. We have established a national advisory committee dealing with guns, gangs, and violence.

We need to cut off the supply of handguns, impose stricter border controls and levy significant legislative and judicial penalties on anyone who uses a gun to commit a violent crime.

The public incidents of violent crime in our municipality must not continue. We must continue to give the police the resources and tools they need to end this behavior. (With the assistance of the Province, we have hired over 100 new police officers over the last four years; and for this I thank them.)

A safe city is a vibrant city where all residents are able to work, play and raise their families and realize their dreams.

HRM is growing and we have to be ready to seize the opportunities presented to us from this growth. By the year 2020, it is estimated the population of Halifax Regional Municipality will be well over 400,000. We need a plan to grow in a way which respects our traditions, pays homage to our heritage and respects our natural beauty and environment. HRM By Design does just that.

HRM By Design was developed for HRM with the input of the people of HRM on how they want their city to grow into the economic and socially responsible powerhouse I believe we are destined to become. Urban sprawl and growth for the sake of growth are the ways of the past. People today are looking for a clear and compelling vision for our city, clarity and predictability for our business and development community as well as incentives for good design and responsible development.

I am extremely proud of what Council, the Urban Design Task Force and staff has accomplished with HRM By Design and I think one of our lasting legacies for future generations is going to come from the responsible and thoughtful manner in which we plan development.

Capitalizing on our heritage, our people, and our physical advantages is one of the major components in moving HRM forward. Our natural beauty, international airport and port facilities make Halifax a natural centre for convention business.

In the fiscal year ending in 2007, Halifax had over \$168 million in direct spending as a result of conventions, and special events. This is the largest number in our history and it continues to grow. The total investment in **direct spending** as a result of conventions and special events has now topped the billion dollar mark.

But we're not satisfied ladies and gentlemen so, with the Province of Nova Scotia and public sector, we are moving ahead to construct a new 1.2 million square feet trade and convention complex, with a five-star hotel and Class A office and retail space that will move Halifax well ahead of the competition, not only in terms of physical location and attractiveness but also in terms of having the best facility in the country.

As members of the Chamber and the business community, you continue to do your part in growing HRM by locating and investing here, by creating jobs here. My focus today is to remind us all that because we are committed to our communities we are thriving and growing stronger. We are able to move forward economically, socially and with environmental responsibility.

In this regard, ladies and gentlemen we are only limited in our own ability to dream and I dream of a day when HRM we are not only the economic engine of Atlantic Canada as we are now, but I dream of a day when with your help and the help of the community, HRM is indeed one of the major economic engines of Canada. Dream big, plan big and achieve big.

Thank you very much.