

**Business Voice column**  
**By Mayor Mike Savage**  
**April 2015**

The great potential of Canada's cities in determining economic futures of countries is a frequent topic of discussion of late, and it is quite likely only the beginning. This interest should come as no surprise. Canada is an increasingly urbanized country with 27 million Canadians now living in cities.

Here at home, we know that the success of Nova Scotia rests in no small way on the success of its largest city. We heard it in the Ivany Commission's **Now or Never** report; we've seen and heard it in the year since the report's release in the work of the One Nova Scotia Coalition.

Halifax does not derive its strength from weakening the rest of the province, quite the contrary. In a province as small as ours, we must all look for new ways to build on all of our strengths by being more entrepreneurial, collaborative, and creative as one strong, united province.

The key component of Halifax success is not City Hall, transit systems, or road networks, or nice architecture. It's not the port, head offices, banks, government jobs, or universities – all of which have a big role to play.

It is, as it has always been in great cities everywhere, people. The same density of population that once resulted in the spread of disease and atrocious living standards, also led the way to modern medicine, sanitation, building and labour codes. People in proximity breed ideas and innovation that advance society and fuel the economy.

The true possibility of cities rests in attracting and retaining people and creating the climate in which people can come together. We can do that through good design of our physical spaces: our streets, sidewalks and parks and public buildings, and in newer ways through technology – public wifi, open data and apps that put the city in the palm of its citizens' hands. Our new Central Library is a prime example of bricks and mortar, technology, and the people they attract meeting at a new kind of community crossroads.

More and more, our city is a place where our citizens share ideas just as they share cars, work spaces, bike lanes, transit buses, and library collections. This is the Halifax we need to be if we are to attract and keep new people, whether they be recent graduates, new Canadians, or young workers in search of opportunities.

To that end, we're working more closely with our universities and Nova Scotia Community College on talent attraction and retention. The city's Bridging the Gap paid internship program is a case in point. We continue to direct money saved through vacancy management to a fund to hire recent graduates into jobs that are designed with them in mind.

Through the program they gain valuable experience in their field, and the city gets an injection of new talent and fresh perspectives. Not a bad trade. The first time I met with the group and asked them how many of them would like to stay in Halifax, every one of them raised their hand.

Now imagine if every large employer in this city – or this province - took a similar approach. How many young people would choose to hang their new diploma here instead of migrating west? We've seen some encouraging moves in this direction of late. The Province of Nova Scotia has announced its

Graduate to Opportunities program that will cover 25 percent of salaries in the first year for new graduates hired by small to medium-sized businesses.

And, the Halifax Partnership has expanded its impressive Connector Program that helps new grads and newcomers to Halifax build professional networks that hopefully lead to jobs. I couldn't agree more with the Partnership's push to make this the Year of the Graduate, by encouraging more companies to target more positions for newly-minted grads.

New Canadians are another rich vein of new talent. When my office and the Presidents of our post-secondary schools hosted a welcome reception for first-year international students last fall, so many young people showed up I feared we would run out of food.

The good news is that whether it's our young city interns or international students who have chosen to study in Halifax so many of them want to make a life here. That's a start. The hard work is to create the opportunities that will keep more of them. Let's all act boldly to find new opportunities for the people our workforce – and our province – so keenly needs.

It's time to think differently and to act decisively to shape a new Nova Scotia economy that is less reliant on traditional industry and government largesse. In Canada, in the U.S., in Europe and elsewhere, cities are demonstrating that where you have people, you have potential. It is abundantly clear that Halifax has a leadership role to play in attracting the people to make the next Nova Scotia happen.