MAYOR BRENDA HALLORAN’S 2014 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Thank you Mayor Ryan for that lovely introduction. I look forward to spending the day with you. And thank you all for being here for my annual – and my last – state of the city address.

My tenure as Mayor of the City of Waterloo has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Waterloo’s position on the global stage is one of strength, intelligence, growth and stability – it has been an honour and a privilege to work with council and staff over these years to ensure our city has such a bright and exciting future.

So what exactly will our new council inherit? As I think back to the city’s 2011-2014 strategic plan, it becomes very clear just how much this council has accomplished.

Sustainability and our living environment, the first of our strategic pillars, is the most highly regarded characteristic of our community. I am pleased to report that we will be implementing approximately 100 energy and water saving measures across city-owned facilities this year. As a result of these changes, we can expect a potential reduction of our corporate infrastructure deficit by an estimated $1.7 million. As an active member of ClimateActionWR, our goal will be to reduce community greenhouse gas emissions by 6% by 2020 – a target approved by council this past November.

Speaking of our environment; I would like to congratulate city staff on the work they have done this past year.

Since April 2013 we have been plagued by ice storms, a wind storm and major snow storms. Our staff have worked tirelessly to clean up trees, plow our streets and city sidewalks, and repair broken watermains, while our communications team and local media have done a tremendous job keeping our residents updated on our progress. Our hard working City of Waterloo staff have made sure our city remained open for business during some very treacherous weather and your efforts are much appreciated. Hopefully Mother Nature will go a little easier on us this year!
There are several components to a healthy and safe community. I am so proud of the work we are doing to preserve our standing with the World Health Organization, as an Age Friendly City. Our commitment to improving our age-friendliness remains a top priority and is demonstrated by the launch of our older adult strategy. As our population ages, this strategy will ensure that the evolving needs and interests of this group are met, so that all residents can participate in meaningful recreation programs to stay healthy and active.

Public engagement, another of our strategic pillars, is such an important method of communication and something I believe we do very well.

In January 2013 we launched our new corporate website and our smartphone app - PingStreet, which we collaborated on with eSolutions and BlackBerry. This award-winning app has been downloaded over 11,000 times and will soon be launched by other local and Canadian municipalities.

Equally important is dynamic dialogue. Since 2011, our social media presence has grown to the point where we have the highest number of Twitter followers, per capita, across Canada. Our residents are engaged, involved and committed to their city through good times and through difficult times. They help us spread the word about projects, policies and events. They attend our public engagement sessions and complete our surveys. Our residents and community are what matter and their input and feedback shape the way we deliver our services. If you’re live-tweeting this event, please make sure you use #SOTC2014 and get us trending!

Collaboration and capacity are the cornerstones of a vibrant community and nowhere is this more important than in our Northdale neighbourhood. This neighbourhood will see an incredible transformation based on the collaboration between the IBM Smarter Cities team, the City of Waterloo, University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University, Conestoga College, the Region of Waterloo and Waterloo Regional Police Services, architects, students, residents and our local business community.

Several recommendations from the IBM Smarter Cities report will be considered and implemented alongside the same group of stakeholders to create a neighbourhood we can all embrace with pride.

What is a healthy and vibrant city without excellent public spaces in which to gather and celebrate? The unveiling of Waterloo Park’s new main entrance is scheduled for June 21 and we hope you will join us. In addition to our impressive roster of green
spaces, parks and trails, this new area will feature an accessible playground and natural play area along with several outdoor rooms which will be used for both active and passive activities. It will certainly complement the exciting and active lifestyle of our uptown core and I can’t wait to see what events our staff and community will host there.

I’m delighted to announce that the Manulife Financial LPGA Classic is coming back to Waterloo this summer. This four-day event has a tremendous impact on our region – it generates $20-$25 million for our local economy, with over $500K in proceeds donated to St. Mary’s Hospital Foundation. This year, the event will run from June 4 – 8 at Grey Silo Golf Course and tickets are now on sale. I’d like to thank the organizing committee for its generous donation of two any-day vouchers and a parking pass for this tournament. We also have four passes for Grey Silo Golf Course and we will award all these passes as door prizes later this morning.

Getting around is an equally important pillar of our strategic plan and we have made significant improvements to the ways our residents travel within the city.

Keeping sustainability in mind, our active transportation program has encouraged and increased the support of cyclists and trail users. We have installed new bike racks at city facilities and in the uptown core and improved our trails by posting better wayfinding signage, resurfacing with asphalt and adding accessibility features.

Earlier this year we engaged our residents with a contest to rename the Interior Trail Loop. There were several great suggestions and I’m happy to announce that the trail has been renamed the WaterLoop.

While we continue to support alternative methods of transportation, vehicles remain a reality both inside and outside the core. Later this year we will be upgrading Lexington Road and Columbia Street West to support drivers, cyclists and pedestrians traveling in these areas and plans are underway for a brand new uptown streetscape in 2015.

You may be asking yourself, how does a municipality provide such top-notch service to its residents while remaining fiscally responsible? What will our bank statement report when our new council takes its seat in chambers next year?

As of December 2012, our outstanding debt was $63.3 million, lower than it has been in the past ten years. We did issue debt in 2013 for projects that are funded from development charges, for growth that is occurring in the city.
We continue however, to maintain our debt levels at a responsible level and well below the provincial cap.

We have a stable reserve and reserve fund balances that we are monitoring to ensure we have sufficient funds in the future to maintain and replace our capital assets. We are undertaking the development of the asset management plan as part of our strategy to be fiscally responsible.

It’s important to note that we aim to serve our residents with as little financial impact as possible. In fact, our tax increases remain among the lowest in the Region.

We know there are challenges ahead of us. We are under pressure to invest in community grants, in arts and culture, and unanticipated costs associated with recovering from the ice, wind and snow storms this past year. Infrastructure is a challenge for us. Systems are aging, intensification is forcing us to upgrade – but we understand how vital sound infrastructure is to a vibrant and growing city. We are moving forward with our annual $30 million in capital upgrades and expansion projects, and we will continue to advocate for more provincial and federal funding to make sure we do not remain stagnant. It is our responsibility to find that balance between maintaining a reasonable tax rate and funding initiatives that the community expects from us.

This brings me to the final pillar of our strategic plan – economic vitality. The programs and incentives this council has approved will enhance our reputation as a location of choice for businesses and developers alike. Our brownfield community improvement plan, for example, will encourage developers to build on lands they may not have considered otherwise.

Of course the obvious can’t be overstated – development and growth in Waterloo is booming. There are currently nine cranes in operation across the city and our building permit value is strong with $372 million in construction value generated in 2013. Over $150 million of that comes from the industrial, commercial and institutional sectors. As a result, these continue to be exciting times for Waterloo.

Not only are we seeing employment land development like the Waterloo Corporate Campus but our skyline continues to take new shape with the Barrelyards and Park Street condo developments nearing completion. These new residential projects will add
more than 2,000 people in the uptown core – a real economic boost for those in the local retail, dining and arts and entertainment industries.

One project I am particularly proud of is the new 4-storey 80,000 square foot medical centre at The Boardwalk. This facility just opened in February and has brought us new medical imaging specialists, a laboratory, pharmacy and most critically, new family doctors for our community.

We all believe in the success of our city and our economic development team is making great strides to promote Waterloo locally and to the world.

In November last year, we launched our new economic development website - wearewaterloo.ca. The goal of this site is to augment the work that our economic development team is already doing to solidify Waterloo’s place on the global stage. The site highlights city specific benefits, amenities, arts and culture events, as well as available lands and development areas. This new and modernized tool makes it easier for site selectors, external business prospects and local businesses to choose Waterloo for their next business venture.

Culture, no matter how you define it, is the glue that holds a community together. A defining moment for the city, in my opinion, was when council approved our culture plan – a community vision that proposes to make Waterloo an even more vibrant and creative city in which to live, work, learn and play. People move here for employment and to attend our academic institutions, and they benefit from the arts, entertainment, shopping, recreation and leisure activities this community offers. There is always something happening in Waterloo for citizens of all ages!

The community will soon be asked to think about a new strategic plan for the 2015-2018 council term. What is the one idea you want council and staff to consider in the future? I encourage you to complete the questionnaire included in your program to guide us as we move forward with this initiative.

This year’s election will bring with it new faces, fresh ideas and different perspectives. I’d like to think though, that the demands of leadership will be eased somewhat by an amazing inheritance – a ground-breaking, intelligent, resilient and progressive city with an economically viable future.

Let me take a few moments to show you what I mean.
WE ARE WATERLOO

Waterloo is a highly desirable community and it’s incumbent upon us to uphold that prestige because it’s not just our new council that will inherit this city. It’s Mayor Ryan and the mayors that follow him that we must also consider. But we can’t do it alone. We must collaborate with our homegrown talent to provide innovative solutions for today’s economic challenges.

CTFF, or Canada’s Technology For Food, is a creative enterprise that exemplifies our efforts. Together with the Accelerator Centre, CTFF is working to secure the long-term sustainability of our food and beverage sector by supporting technologies that advance jobs, improve food safety and increase food and agricultural technology exports.

Collaboration has also been the key to absorbing displaced BlackBerry employees. With the ongoing support of Communitech, the Accelerator Centre and our growing startup companies, more than 1,000 former BlackBerry employees have found new jobs right here in the Region.

We are the Silicon Valley of the north. There are over 30,000 technology professionals working in Waterloo Region, with half of the technology companies located right here in the City of Waterloo. These companies are redefining our economy at a local, provincial, national and international scale making us one of three Canadian cities ranked in the top 20 most active startup scenes. Companies like Open Text, ChangeIt, Aeryon Labs, Teledyne DALSA, Kik, Virtek, Magnet Forensics, – the list goes on and on – they have chosen to launch and grow their businesses right here in Waterloo. Why? Because amazing and powerful things are brewing in our city and the world is taking notice.

- 2007 World’s Most Intelligent Community
- IBM Smarter Cities Challenge Grant recipient 2013
- Top 20 World’s Start Up Ecosystem
- Top 50 Best Cities to Live in Canada
- 2nd in Canada to attract skilled and creative workers
- Winner of the FCM 2013 Sustainable Communities Water Award for our GreenLab Rainwater Harvesting & Reuse Project
- Governor General’s Medals In Architecture Award for the Canadian Clay and Glass Museum
- Royal Institute of British Architects International Award for the CIGI Campus
- World Health Organization designation as an Age Friendly City
Awards like these have other cities and countries asking – how do they do it? How has Waterloo transitioned from a small Mennonite manufacturing town to a powerhouse community with an incredibly diverse economy?

This is exactly what a news reporter from SBS World News Australia asked me in a Skype interview last month.

Once known for its coal mining and steel production, the City of Wollongong, Australia is currently struggling with high unemployment as a result of recent plant closures. However, the city is on the verge of reinvention and they are using its high-tech university as the catalyst for change. They are looking to our city, the City of Waterloo, as its inspiration.

Speaking of Australia, I’d like to congratulate Conestoga-Rovers & Associates on their recent announcement to merge with GHD – one of the world’s leading engineering, architecture and environmental consulting companies based in Sydney, Australia. This merger is expected to be a springboard for further growth and opportunities for both companies, and I am thrilled that Waterloo will become GHD’s North American headquarters.

Waterloo is viewed as a leading model for innovation and collaboration. Because of this exceptional reputation, we have joined the cities of Kitchener and Cambridge as a StartUp Canada Community. Having collaborated with several business incubators, we have witnessed the launch and growth of thousands of startups, and are now in a position to share our expertise with other communities. We are passionate about this initiative because it allows us to pay it forward – and we are thrilled to engage and mentor the next wave of creative entrepreneurial minds across Canada and in the case of Wollongong, Australia, perhaps across the world as well.

It’s wonderful to know that we have the support of our federal government in this regard.

A new $300 million venture capital partnership was recently launched at the Tannery. The NorthLeaf Venture Catalyst Fund is a joint initiative between the federal government and private businesses that will help launch new startups, create new jobs and further bolster our local economy.
The Government of Canada’s 2015 budget allocated significant funding for transformational research at the University of Waterloo. $15 million will be granted to the Institute for Quantum Computing over the next three years. This is incredible news and a strong show of support for science and innovation in Waterloo.

And that’s not all! Earlier this week Premier Kathleen Wynne announced plans to bring full-day, two-way GO Train service between Waterloo Region and the GTA by 2016. This is incredible news on multiple fronts. It will ensure the vitality and liveability of our urban centres, which is key as we compete to attract, retain and expand our knowledge-based work force that will further elevate our existing assets and amenities. We’re pleased the province recognized our vision and is collaborating with our consortium to make this a reality.

We know the talent that pours out of our acclaimed universities and college is one of our biggest advantages.

Just recently, the University of Waterloo announced the results of its economic impact study and let’s just say the impact is incredible – over $2.6B in spending in Ontario with more than 20,000 jobs created each year. This university already draws thousands of students because of its winning status in several competitive categories and now with Canadian astronaut Commander Hadfield taking up residence there, enrollment is sure to sky rocket.

It’s not just UW that’s making waves. CIGI, the Centre for International Governance Innovation, introduced its law program last fall which will be a big game-changer for the uptown core. Wilfrid Laurier University’s much-anticipated Global Innovation Exchange is on target to open the summer of 2015, housing its school of business and economics and the faculty of math.

Whether it’s producing new startup companies, generating billions of dollars for our local economy, or making scientific break-throughs the world has never imagined – our knowledge economy is second to none.

Our gifted students are what set us apart from the rest of the world and continued collaboration with University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University and Conestoga College will be critical if we are to stay competitive in the global marketplace.

Vibrant neighbourhoods, engaged citizens and a bright economic future is what Mayor Ryan will inherit when he becomes mayor. Waterloo was built on entrepreneurship and
innovation. If we continue to leverage our partnerships, foster collaboration and support the talent that exists in our community, I am confident that Waterloo will remain well-positioned for the 21st century and beyond.

Great things are in store for our city. Our future is bright. It is bright because we are creating it together. Waterloo is a force to be reckoned with and we are going to change the world – again.