

Inaugural Address
Mayor Wayne Baldwin
City of White Rock
December 5, 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen, Honoured Guests, Staff, and Fellow Members of Council;

To be elected a member of Council is truly an honour and a privilege. It is both exciting and daunting. It can be incredibly fulfilling, it can be incredibly frustrating. It is always a lot of hard work and it will always be challenging.

White Rock is a City poised on the brink of possibilities. Council is kind of like an Olympic Bobsled team at the top of the run. Getting off the bobsled and opting for a toboggan run instead is not really an option. We must move ahead as a team and do the best we can. Anything less is not acceptable. Here at the beginning of the run the possibilities are endless. They are exciting. They are more than a little scary because dealing with them will mean that some things will change.

On November 19, the people of White Rock elected a Council that echoes those possibilities.

When I first looked at the list of thirteen (13) candidates for Councillors and examined their credentials and capabilities, I was both pleased and heartened. My first thought was that if I were fortunate enough to be elected Mayor, any combination of these thirteen (13) worthy people would have the potential to constitute one of the best, if not the best Councils we have had in the past 30 years.

Consequently, I have very high expectations of this Council. I am confident that as long as we individually and collectively keep foremost in our minds that our main purpose in being elected is to do what is best for the people of White Rock as a whole, we cannot help but be successful. We will achieve remarkable things, and we will make the people of White Rock proud to live in White Rock.

As a group, we know that the previous Council has done a lot of ground work for us. They have left many reports with a great many recommendations. We must start to sift through those reports and begin to act upon those recommendations.

One of the many priorities we will have to address is the renewal and the increase of our commercial core. Clearly, some changes have to be made. Economic Development Reports in 2009 and 2011, and the 2011 Town Centre Urban Design Plan have all said the same thing – we must increase the allowable density in the Town Centre. We have to act upon this advice and do so without delay.

We must provide customers for our businesses so that not only will the existing businesses thrive but also so that our commercial tax base will increase.

We will welcome investment into our community because investment will lead to renewal, and renewal will lead to a better more sustainable tax base and a more sustainable community. However, we will not do so at any cost. We will accept redevelopment only on our terms.

We will respect the need of investors to realize a decent return on their investment. But, in turn, they will have to respect our need for amenities to build a safer, stronger, more independent community for all our residents, businesses, and visitors.

We will get a firm grip on our finances and our financial processes. This is absolutely imperative in order to ensure that we have a strong, independent community and to minimize taxation. Moreover, our financial processes are at the core of Council's fiduciary responsibility and deviations will neither be accepted nor tolerated.

A community that looks after its infrastructure, plans for the future, and has the resources to deal with social issues and needs while minimizing taxes will be a sustainable community and that is what we want.

We will be a Council that shows respect for the public, for each other, and for the public processes by which we govern.

As a demonstration of that respect I am announcing two changes to our processes.

First, effective immediately, we will discontinue the practice of pre-scheduling In-Camera or Closed meetings. Closed meetings remain a necessity, but will only be held if required. Moreover, the criteria for deciding if they are to be held will not be, "How can we take this In-Camera?" but rather, "Does this have to be In-Camera?"

Second, we will hold Public Forums on a quarterly basis to listen to what the public has to say about certain issues, and perhaps simply to get advice or ideas from our citizens and businesses. The first of these Forums will be held early in the spring and I will be requesting input from the Council and the staff as to what the topic should be.

Finally, with respect to governance, the new Council-Elect held some informal discussions, and found that we were unanimous in our belief that as a City we must continue to improve our communications with the Public. Furthermore, we agreed that we have to do a better job of engaging the Public in the City's governance. A voting rate of less than 30% is simply just not good enough.

To this end, therefore, I am creating a new Standing Committee of Council, the External Communications Review Committee. This committee will have the task of continuously monitoring our public communications and will make recommendations to Council as to what areas need improvement, or what other changes in our communication processes have to be made from time to time.

In conclusion then, I want to reiterate something I have said on numerous occasions.

If Vancouver, can be considered to be the most livable City in the world by several recognized agencies, then logically, it follows that White Rock can be said to be the best City, in the best Province, in the best country in the world.

This Council will be dedicated to ensuring that this ranking is undeniably true.