



City of White Rock
Office of Mayor

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City of White Rock State of the City Address Hosted by the South Surrey & White Rock Chamber of Commerce

5:30 p.m. | Wednesday, October 7, 2015 | White Rock Community Centre

Good evening and thank you for coming tonight.

Thank you to the Chamber of Commerce for hosting and organizing the annual White Rock State of the City Address, and thanks to all the City staff for assisting in pulling it all together.

I want to recognize that this event is being held on the traditional lands of the Semiahmoo First Nation and the Coast Salish people.

I am very proud to be standing here tonight to talk about some of the accomplishments that your Council has achieved so far, and to provide an overview of the major priorities for this Council for the coming years.

Council priorities for the term of office are set at the commencement of the term. They are also reviewed and modified annually as unexpected issues arise and circumstances change. Frankly, we must be flexible as priorities can change too.

But what we are really talking about is how we, as the elected officials, can work with the community, no matter the challenge, to create a vision for our community.

This much I know is true:

We are blessed in White Rock to have a rare combination of dedicated staff, committed elected officials and engaged citizens who are all equally passionate about our community.

It's this collective passion that I believe will ensure our community will remain a jewel of the Lower Mainland Region.

That's not to say that everyone always agrees all of the time – because they don't - but I believe that great communities are built when there is an environment of respect and the acknowledgement of differences of opinion. That core value is the foundation of success for White Rock.

More than 200 years ago Voltaire said, "I disapprove of what you say, but will defend to the death your right to say it."

I spent 15 years of my life in the army in order to protect our democracy, so, I am in complete agreement with Voltaire. While I obviously disapprove of what those outside are saying, I will defend their right to say it at an appropriate time and place...but maybe not to the death.

So, let's talk about some examples of successes we have achieved as a Council.

Looking Back

Firstly, Council has worked hard to deal with the issue of rail safety and whistle cessation – the impact of which was brought to the forefront of our community as a result of a tragic accident in July 2013.

Council has worked to deal with the resulting restrictions, extra whistling, crossing closures and installation of mesh fencing required by Transport Canada.

By June of this year, we had completed Transport Canada’s safety requirements to:

- Provide after hour vehicle restrictions to the boat launch;
- Overlay all fencing along the promenade with mesh; and
- Rebuild two pedestrian crossings in the West Beach to the new specifications at a cost of just under \$500,000.

The cooperation and compliance the City demonstrated prompted Transport Canada to restore the whistling ban from 12:00 a.m. (midnight) to 6:00 a.m. and allows our residents to once again “get a good night’s sleep” – finally.

Another area of work this Council has been focused on was in the area of solid waste – a serious issue that is facing communities across the Lower Mainland – and the rest of Canada.

The previous term’s Council had, as one of its priorities, to implement the conversion of payment for the collection and disposal of solid waste from a tax (based on assessed value) to a fee (based on user pay). At the same time, Metro Vancouver had determined that organics should be separated from the waste stream. As of July 1 of this year, fines were to be levied for non-compliance.

I’m proud to say that our community had already achieved excellent results in terms of organic separation in the single family areas. Unfortunately, those same results did not apply to the multi-family and commercial buildings (a result not unique to White Rock).

In order to address both those issues, right at the outset of the term, Council unanimously voted to move to a “best-in-class” program for condominiums and commercial buildings, similar to most other communities across the region. This involved multi-family and commercial buildings contracting to private service providers whose core business was waste removal.

Initially, as is often the case with change, there were some concerns, some of which were set aside when a large number of owners realized they were already contracting out the service as well as paying for it on their taxes, so the resultant 9% reduction per year in taxes was welcomed.

Others found ways to make it more economical by tailoring the pick ups to meet their own specific building needs. Some had an immediate net savings because the tax reduction more than off set the cost of the service.

We acknowledge that this has not been an easy transition for the community. But, we have risen to the challenge and seem to be successfully making it work.

As we progress, we will continue to monitor this operation to ensure optimal service delivery and implement improvements, if required.

Another continuing council priority is in the area of the arts and festivals, with a goal of making the arts a second economic generator, following tourism, for our City.

Currently we are half way through the two month long Fall Festival of the Arts and we have had a number of successful functions on the beach:

- White Rock Moon Festival; and
- Festival of lights: Diwali Integration

Both of these events have drawn great crowds and I believe have demonstrated the family-friendly, inclusive community culture that exists here in White Rock.

Not only do we welcome the opportunity to learn about other cultures, but we also embrace them within our own cultural mosaic.

To that end, we recently signed a Friendship Agreement with Dongying, Shandong Province, China.

Some of the other successful community events which the City has sponsored so far this year are:

- The TD Concerts at the Pier series of live musical performances in partnership with the White Rock BIA;
- The revived White Rock Sea Festival and Torch Light Parade in partnership with the White Rock Events Society;
- Master Artists in the Library Program;
- The unveiling of a public art piece “The Passenger;”
- The revived “Tour de White Rock;”
- Semiahmoo First Nations “Healthy Ways Pulling Together” at the Pier; and
- Raising the Pride Flag at City Hall for the first time.

Additionally, the City has increased its financial assistance to the Semiahmoo Arts, the Players Club, and Peninsula Productions. We are looking forward to the International Artists Day on October 24.

Communications

Connecting and engaging our community is a cornerstone of this Council as well as City staff.

Improving public service means supporting open and transparent government and public access to information. To that end we have undertaken a series of open houses, forums, and city information meetings on a range of issues including:

- The TransLink Referendum;
- The Solid Waste Program;
- The Official Community Plan;
- The Water Utility Acquisition; and
- The Urban Forest Management Plan.

By October 15, we will have held 11 such events. In comparison, we held three (3) forums in 2012, three (3) in 2013 and six (6) in 2014.

In the interest of transparency and disclosure, we now provide quarterly summaries of the topics discussed in Closed Council meetings, and we have initiated a new online communication forum called, “Talk White Rock.”

I invite you all to become a part of the community dialogue – this is about ensuring that our community has an avenue for input and discussion on relevant topics and ideas.

Tourism

While we are actively promoting the arts, tourism remains our number one economic generator. In order to increase our tourism office effectiveness, one of Council's priorities was to prepare a tourism strategy plan.

Through engagement with our community stakeholders, our Tourism Task Force has almost completed its review and is on the verge of reporting and presenting their recommendations to council.

It is our expectation that the strategic plan will enable us to be more effective in promoting tourism for the benefit of our businesses, and better prepared to take advantage of funding and partnership opportunities in the areas of cruise ship excursions and sport tourism.

To that end, I am excited that many of our community members will be actively involved, and our business community will undoubtedly benefit greatly from the Women's World Softball Championships taking place at Softball City in July of 2016, right next door in North White Rock. This event is expected to be the largest singlesport world championship in North American history, drawing in excess of 35 teams and 100,000 or more fans from around the world.

Water Utility

There is no question that acquiring our own water utility is important and has been a key priority of Council since 2013, when we first learned of the financial implications of EPCOR's Total Water Quality Management Plan or TWQMP. The TWQMP necessitated a massive upgrade of the water system infrastructure as well as the chlorination of White Rock's water and the likelihood of future arsenic and manganese treatment.

Council was motivated to pursue this purchase so that the economic benefits of ownership would accrue to the residents of White Rock. As a regulated utility, EPCOR was entitled to a return on its investment approved by the Province at more than 10%.

We cannot disclose confidential information from the owner, but the public record suggests that the profit earned by EPCOR would be in the order of \$1 million per year and increasing.

Council decided that it would be in the best interest of the taxpayers if that profit were to remain in White Rock and be returned to the taxpayers once the debt incurred to purchase the utility and to pay for the system upgrades is paid off. Although there were some challenges in the process, the City forged ahead. In the end, we were able to come to a negotiated agreement with EPCOR.

I am pleased to announce that the City of White Rock has now virtually completed the biggest single investment expenditure in its history in the acquisition of its own water utility!

We will take over its operation by the end of October. This is an important step forward for taxpayers and keeps the water charges paid by White Rock residents in White Rock.

Although an option was to operate the utility temporarily through an operating agreement with EPCOR, the city has decided to proceed by way of offers of employment to EPCOR employees in White Rock following collaborative and supportive discussions with our CUPE Union.

We are proud to confirm that a signed agreement has been made with CUPE enabling us to hire the local EPCOR employees and provide the service in-house.

We therefore have every expectation that the service delivery will continue to operate seamlessly to the benefit of the taxpayers of White Rock.

Now I want to share with you some of Council's priorities for the future, priorities that were unanimously approved by Council.

Official Community Plan (OCP) Update

Ideally, the OCP should be updated every five years. The last update took place in 2008, and we are pleased to see it is now in full swing and community engagement is well underway.

The final draft is scheduled to be considered by Council in December 2016. This is a huge project, and I want to thank our dedicated staff team who are working hard on this important assignment.

I believe that as a Council we have been consistent in saying that we want development in our community that isn't just good – but is great.

Development that is done right, with long-term benefits for the established and new residents of this community is the kind of project that is welcomed in White Rock.

We have a very special community here, and we are committed in keeping it that way.

Speaking on the OCP process, the City is hosting an Open House at Centennial Hall tomorrow evening from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., where anyone can attend at any point during the two hours to learn more and provide input on the draft vision and goal statements.

If you are not able to make it, there will also be a survey available on “Talk White Rock” where you can provide input online.

Johnston Road

The main entrance to the City and its commercial core – Johnston Road - has not been addressed for 35 years and is in dire need of attention. Council is aware of this, and the need to revitalize that area and create harmonious vehicular and pedestrian interfaces.

Staff are working with the White Rock BIA and consultants to come up with a plan to rebuild Johnston Road from North Bluff to Thrift Avenue. This is a big project, with a preliminary estimate of over \$2m.

In the end we want a gateway to the City that will make a bold statement, will be inviting, will make you want to stroll and shop there, and that will make us all proud.

We expect that this project will be completed by the end of 2017.

People Movement

I think everyone in White Rock – Council – residents – City staff want to see our town centre become more energetic and viable commercially by providing opportunities for people to reside within walking distance of the commercial core, and by advancing the “shop local” theme.

We want to see more people leaving their cars at home by supporting and promoting a greener, healthier lifestyle in a walkable, and sustainable community.

There is a bit of a barrier however. Our natural geography in White Rock is split into the uptown and waterfront areas and this presents challenges with respect to “people movement.” This is a challenge Council would like to tackle.

Buses alone do not cut it. While parking on the waterfront can be improved, alone it is not the answer, particularly for our residents.

What is needed is connectivity that is more direct, that will eliminate the geographic and mobility barriers and provide a means to move the 10,000 people in our condominiums to and from the waterfront without the necessity of driving.

Last year, we invested in a plan to improve the Centre Street road allowance as a walking route to the waterfront. That plan is still there awaiting the availability of a grant from another level of government for that purpose, and we are continuing to lobby for its approval.

In the meantime, Council is also looking to the viability of something more ambitious – something that will be a waterfront attraction, as well as serve as a practical means of getting people, including those with mobility limitations, up and down the hillside. To that end, a preliminary study of options has been completed and we are looking at turning that vision into reality.

Consequently, we have asked staff to investigate the feasibility of a funicular system.

The system could take the form of an overhead cable car, an at-grade trolley or even an escalator. All these systems work elsewhere in the world and could work here too.

We will see.

Waterfront

Our waterfront remains the jewel of our City. It brands us. It is our identity. So Council has special interest in waterfront improvements.

There are a number of potential projects that Council will be examining in some detail for the future.

Although each of these projects pose obstacles and require collaboration with stakeholders and other orders of government, this Council is motivated and ready to roll up our sleeves.

Some of the proposals that will be investigated include:

1. Marina Expansion

Marina expansion could include simply dredging to improve what is already there, or it could be assessing the feasibility of extending the pier into deeper water where dredging is not an issue. It could also include installing mooring floats for deeper draft visiting vessels.

2. Parking Options

Notwithstanding our plan to make the waterfront more accessible to pedestrians via linkages from the town centre, there still remains a need for additional parking in the prime commercial area around the pier. To this end, a tiered parking structure has been planned to be built on the City land at Vidal and Victoria in 2017.

3. Pier Restaurant

Historically, there had been a structure at the base of the pier. In fact, two of them. One that burned down in 1935 and the other in 1970. Council is considering the possibility of once again using that historical location for a commercial restaurant.

4. Beach and Promenade Improvements

We are examining the feasibility of extending the promenade westward to connect to Coldicutt Ravine.

We are also looking at creating more land and climate proofing the East Beach portion of the promenade by filling in some of the beach and allowing the promenade to meander. This would create space for the construction of an all-abilities playground and possibly incorporate an artistic sculpture. Finally, we are revisiting the concept of the Spirit Square adjacent to the Museum.

Ice Time

Another priority for Council was to respond to the perceived need for additional ice facilities for youth.

Council recognizes that there is a problem for young families in our community due to the shortage of ice time and the need to drive young children a long way at odd hours for practices and games.

Consequently, Council has decided to investigate the feasibility of providing additional ice. Work on this has begun, but not yet complete.

Rail Relocation

It is time for the trains to move. It is time for dangerous goods to leave the waterfront before a serious accident occurs. It is time for “Rails to Trails.”

We know only too well what can happen when rail accidents occur involving dangerous goods and we have dangerous goods, lots of them: chlorine, hydrochloric acid, ethanol, anhydrous ammonia, liquid hydrocarbons, hydrogen peroxide, sodium hydroxide, petroleum, and bakken crude.

Late last year Council resolved to make application to the Canadian Transportation Agency to relocate the tracks from the waterfront. However, the rail issues also affects neighbouring communities, and in fact, an accident is most likely to occur in Surrey. Furthermore, any solution will obviously have to involve Surrey.

Therefore, the City is discussing the possibility of a joint rail application with the City of Surrey. We are hopeful that serious collaborative rail relocation planning will be taking place in the near future.

Some may ask, “Do we have a legitimate case?” Yes, I believe we do.

In looking at alternate potential routes, the current route along the waterfront is probably the least likely one that would have been chosen if starting from scratch, given the long, meandering pathway alongside an environmentally sensitive shoreline and ocean, the inherent potential for serious slides to occur, and hillside instability.

There is a history of slides in this area. There have been derailments in the past. Three caused by slides hitting the train, four by the train hitting debris from the slides.

The slides continue today and are likely to get worse, given climate change, and the increased vibration caused by the increased length and weight and frequency of the trains.

The potential loss of life and environmental damage that could result from a derailment is immense. It could have much greater consequences than the tragic disaster that occurred in Lac Megantic.

By relocating the tracks, we can make it safer and reduce the travel time significantly for the railroad.

If successful, this would be the only relocation proposal in Canada that actually shortens the distance and reduces the travel time for the railroad.

We also believe that the BNSFR is not opposed to the notion, particularly since it would make their operation more efficient.

As Lao Tzu famously said, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

We are starting to build support and partners for this proposal but we recognize that this will be a long process – one that is not likely to be concluded in this term of office.

But just look ahead!

- Imagine the Rails to Trails.
- Imagine being able to cycle or walk from White Rock to Tsawwassen.
- Imagine making the former railway part of the Trans Canada Trail.

What a future for our City!

Summary and Closing

In closing, I want to assure you that your Council and your City staff are working hard to make this community stronger and better. That is what we are elected to do.

We will continue to forge ahead and make decisions in the best interests of the community as whole.

There is no doubt that White Rock continues to evolve and transform.

We are a City that is blessed with both challenges and opportunities.

We've come far, but much more is left to do.

Yes, things change, but the change can be managed, and we will do just that in a constructive, transparent, collaborative and positive way.

I would like to share a short story with you. A couple of years ago my wife and I spent a weekend together at Harrison. As we were sitting in one of the pools we couldn't help but overhear a comment from the young couple opposite us who were obviously newlyweds. The young man boldly declared to his new bride, "Honey, the future for us is so bright, I have to put on my sunglasses to look at it."

That is exactly how I feel about White Rock.

So, on behalf of Council, I would like to say, "Residents, stakeholders and community partners - get your sunglasses ready because the future for White Rock is exceedingly bright."

Thank you.



Mayor Wayne Baldwin
City of White Rock