



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

Good afternoon.

Thank you, Caroline, for that generous introduction—generous enough that I believe it less every year.

Thank you as well to Verge Insurance for supporting this event, and to the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce—Mishka, Hugo, Corrina, and the entire team—for making today possible.

To my team—Zoe, Kherian, and Brianne—thank you. You make me look like I know what I'm doing, and I appreciate everything you do.

I also want to acknowledge the staff from the City and Region here today, including our CAO David Oakes and Deputy CAO Erin O'Hoski. Once again, St. Catharines has been recognized as one of Hamilton-Niagara's Top Employers—something we should all be proud of.

Any success I've had is because of the people who do the work every day to keep this city running.

I'm going to admit something – Chuck McShane from the Home Builders got in my ear, and he says the big frustration



at speeches like this is the long list of politicians. So I will simply say thank-you to all of my City and Regional colleagues for being here today. If anyone is upset by this – blame Chuck.

With that said, I do want to recognize my predecessors—Tim Rigby, Brian McMullan, and Walter Sendzik. Thank you for your leadership and for the support you’ve shown me during this term of office.

I would also be remiss if I didn’t acknowledge the absence of Jim Bradley.

It is Opening Day, so Jim is probably preparing to watch baseball tonight from up above. But he was a mentor to many of us, myself included. I appreciated his willingness to share his perspective and advice, and I learned a great deal from him. I, along with many other, miss him.

One piece of his advice has stuck with me:

“Mayors do not need to have an opinion on every issue.”

And speaking of issues where I decided to have an opinion – I mentioned to Mishka Balsom that I won’t be speaking about governance in my speech today. The truth is, I made



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

my thoughts clear when I spoke in 2024 and 2025 during my State of the City speeches, and then again when I presented to the Standing Committee. I also know that someone will likely ask about it in the Q and A after this speech. So I will leave any thoughts you may want to hear until then.

This year marks our city's 150th anniversary, since it was incorporated on May 1 of 1876. The city has gone through changes since then – it didn't take this form until January 1st, 1961; that's Black Tuesday as my friends in Merritton continue to refer to it – and this year we get to celebrate those changes in a myriad of ways. Most notable is the 'our common ground' campaign.

This anniversary gives us a chance to reflect on how the land beneath St. Catharines has remained a constant through generations of change, supporting communities from the first Indigenous peoples to freedom seekers on the Underground Railroad, and the agricultural life that sustains the city today. The idea of **“our common ground”** symbolizes how the city's neighbourhoods and people—like the parcels represented in the anniversary logo—are distinct yet connected, forming a shared community. As St. Catharines marks its 150th anniversary, the message emphasizes that the land and shared roots continue to unite residents and provide the foundation for the city's future.



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

The big celebrations will happen on May 2nd with our birthday party at Montebello Park, followed by an enhanced Canada day show at Montebello Park with the Trews as well as a drone show in Port Dalhousie.

This year also marks my fourth State of the City speech. Each year, I've expressed a sense of optimism that our situation here in St. Catharines would continue to improve—and while we've experienced some bumps along the way—hello, once again, to our very strange neighbours to the south—that optimism continues. This year, I have the benefit of something many have been calling for—that mythical beast known as “data”—to back up where that optimism comes from.

Despite the challenges we've faced—challenges not unique to St. Catharines, but shared by municipalities and governments everywhere—and notwithstanding the uncertainty driven by tariffs, interest rates, and labour pressures, our City and our community have stayed focused on the key priorities we set at the start of this Council term.

We have expanded our housing supply through our Housing Accelerator Fund dollars. We have supported and strengthened our business community through proactive



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

economic development efforts. We've developed talent through Skills Development Fund partnerships and our own internal operations. And we've enhanced placemaking—through the work of our Planning department and initiatives like the Downtown Storefront Public Art Project, in partnership with the Downtown Association.

Together, these efforts have led to measurable progress, national recognition, and a growing reputation that St. Catharines is a place where ideas, investment, and people can truly thrive.

So let's talk about the priorities we've set, and where we're at.

In the first six months of this term, Council set an ambitious goal—11,000 units over ten years—to drive development.

St. Catharines has emerged as a model for innovative housing efforts across Canada. While the City does not build housing directly, we play a critical enabling role—and in St. Catharines, those units are being built. Last year, housing permits exceeded our target by more than 40%, and this year they continue at a strong pace. Those approvals are translating into real results, with housing starts reaching 151% of the ten-year average. More than 5,000 units have



also advanced through Site Plan and Zoning Bylaw Amendment applications—more than I’ve seen in my 16 years at City Hall.

All told, we saw more than \$325 million in construction value in 2025—a 150% increase over the ten-year average.

Among our different initiatives, the Municipal Development Corporation has proven to be our most entrepreneurial.

The reality of municipal politics is that you put new ideas in place and wait to see if they work. In our case, we didn’t wait—we identified where adjustments were needed, made improvements, and kept moving. The MDC is a clear example of an idea that is now delivering real results.

In 2025, we entered our first joint venture with Axe Construction on a 22-unit modular build at 6–8 Academy Street—a property that had languished for years with no clear purpose. The MDC also entered into an agreement for the sale of the former Jack Gatecliff site, with plans for 800 rental units. We are also finalizing the transfer of 2 Facer Street, the current home of the Boys and Girls Club, to support a new multi-purpose residential development that will include a new facility alongside much-needed housing on a major transportation corridor.



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

The MDC – and what began as a concept— has been brought to life through grant funding with no risk to the tax base. It is now positioned to generate tax revenue from sites that were once a drain on the City’s finances. That’s a success story by any measure.

Alongside this, we are revamping our Community Improvement Program, including a stream for projects of strategic municipal significance. We are finding ways to move projects forward with the lowest possible impact to taxpayers. As of December 1st, CIP-supported development is saving taxpayers an average of \$45.47 – that’s up from an estimate of \$27 when I did this speech in 2023 - while generating more than \$800 million in new assessment growth that otherwise wouldn’t exist.

We’re also advancing our Official Plan review and the Ontario Street Secondary Plan, focused on making the toughest properties easier to clean up and develop.

Our Accessory Dwelling Unit grants continue to be fully subscribed, adding gentle density across neighbourhoods in ways they can accommodate.



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

Whether it's the new Bridge housing units rising at 320 Geneva, the Sphere development on Welland Avenue, foundations being poured for the Shannex retirement complex, permits soon to be issued for the old Hotel Dieu site, or remediation underway at the former Queenston St Hospital—we are making the units happen.

And we are responding to the housing crisis the only way we can—by making it easier for business to take place in our community.

I also decided, early on, that we needed to do a better job of advocating for our community. The past year especially, has been a time that has needed advocacy. It has not been easy for anyone in our community—heck, anyone in Canada—engaged in business. The uncertainty created by our neighbours to the South has made every aspect of business more difficult and more expensive, whether you're exporting to the U.S. or trying to build here at home. I've spent a lot of time pushing for policies and changes that make it easier for all of us to do business in—and for—St. Catharines.

One of the first steps we took was adopting a Canada-First procurement policy to help shield local suppliers from U.S. tariff impacts. While local government will always seek value for taxpayer dollars, we need to recognize that dollars



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

spent at home don't just improve the bottom line—they support the people who pay taxes in this community. What was a threat this time last year became a reality, and while our business community continues to innovate to survive, our goal at the City has been to help them thrive.

I've worked with a range of organizations to push for changes that benefit our local business community. Here at home, we've been active with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, as well as the Ontario Big City Mayors caucus, working collectively to advocate for procurement changes at the provincial level.

I've also taken on the Co-Chair role with the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, where we launched an Economic Transformation Action Plan to push both Canadian and American governments to prioritize development in the Great Lakes region. That work includes direct advocacy on Parliament Hill and Capitol Hill, and standing up for companies here at home when trade issues threaten them. Most recently, we pushed back against U.S. port fees that would have unfairly targeted Algoma Central and Canada Steamship Lines—two companies with outsized economic impact in our region. This advocacy must continue, for the people who live and work in St. Catharines and Niagara.



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

Through our MayorLinks series, I've also spent time meeting with businesses across our city—large and small—hearing directly about their challenges and opportunities. From Duraroc, working with clients like Mike Holmes to install non-slip rubber surfaces around pools, porches and playgrounds, to Seapark Laundry, employing 63 people and diverting millions of tonnes of waste from landfills, to Haever and Boecker, a global manufacturer rooted right here in St. Catharines—we are listening, and working to support what they're building.

And we've celebrated new businesses opening across the city—entrepreneurs willing to take a chance despite global uncertainty. From Second Glow Thrift Shop to Phoenix Medical Centre, from K1 Speed—where I spun out Diamond Jim Diodati on the first lap—to Physipod and Helliwell Hall, these businesses add to the fabric of our community. And we must do everything in our power to support them as they grow and thrive.

All of these efforts I've been talking about have centred around one theme – it needs to be easier for people to invest in their community. I talked a little bit about the entrepreneurs I've been able to meet as we open businesses in the City – and the idea I remind myself of every time I walk



into a Happy Feet, or The Grid, or Sinibakes, is that the people opening that business are taking a massive risk. Our community has a history of that – building up where there was nothing before; and as we look forward to a new crop of entrepreneurs, it's important to remember where we came from and carry that forward.

As you walk down St. Paul towards the new Helliwall Hall – and how amazing IS Helliwell Hall, amirite? - you'll see a red brick building with a sign facing east that says Moonbase. So what is Moonbase?

Moonbase is a St. Catharines based creative agency that blends art and brand strategy through a fully integrated, end-to-end approach; basically, they make brands look really cool and like they know what they're doing. Their client list includes Nike, Reebok, Atlantic Records, Beats by Dre, Disney, Hulu, Netflix, Sony RCA, Jay Z, Alicia Keys and... the City of St. Catharines ... so yeah, they're kind of a big deal.

They also created this AI video celebrating St. Catharines' 150th anniversary, so if it looks amazing, that's all them... plus 150 years of hard work, innovation, and the people who built this city shining through every frame. Let's roll it.

150 VIDEO 



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

The entrepreneurs I'm speaking about—the ones celebrated in that video, and many of you here today - have invested in themselves and in our community at a pivotal time. That commitment is inspiring, and it's why the City is dedicated to supporting you in every way we can.

That's where our Economic Development and Government Relations team comes in. Part of that team includes the St. Catharines Enterprise Centre, one of the most effective and impactful investments the City makes. The talented team supports people who are investing in themselves and in our community, building not only their own futures, but creating opportunities for others as well. Last year the office directly helped support the start-up and expansion of 152 businesses employing more than 200 people. 🗨️

In Niagara, we often speak proudly about our quality of life, but that quality of life depends on having good jobs, and the ability to afford a place to call home. 🗨️ Last year our city saw a surge in self-employment, adding nearly 600 new independent businesses in just one year. This reflects a growing culture of entrepreneurship, innovation, and flexible work in the local economy.



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

At the same time, overall employment expanded, with total employment surpassing 70,000. Growth was especially strong in key sectors that support community well-being and long-term resilience, including healthcare, construction, and professional services.

St. Catharines is evolving, not shrinking. The economy is becoming more diverse, entrepreneurial, and service-oriented, positioning the city for sustainable future growth.

We're also blessed to have some amazing partners in the community, and I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge some of their great successes over the last year.

Our friends at Brock University launched the \$100M SPARK clean infrastructure initiative—a three-year partnership with the Canadian Infrastructure Bank and Enbridge Sustain that will reduce campus greenhouse gas emissions by 83 per cent by 2028 and cut energy usage by 60 per cent. All of that in 2025, alongside a new 2025–2030 Strategic Plan.

And I would be remiss if I didn't recognize Madalyn Weinart—the absolute GOAT of Brock basketball—named St. Catharines Athlete of the Year. A born-and-bred local, she leads almost every statistical category in Brock basketball history and was named National USports Player



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

of the Year. She's an inspiration to young people across our community.

We also saw Niagara College named Canada's top research college for the second consecutive year, attracting more than \$40 million in support, reaching record enrolment, and breaking ground on a 75,000-square-foot health expansion.

Here at Club Roma—celebrating 65 years this April—we're reminded of the institutions that anchor our community. And on the field, the Club Roma Wolves continue to build on a strong Ontario Premier League season, recognized as the best gameday environment in the league.

Across our sports landscape, success continues to build.

The Niagara River Lions are back-to-back CEBL Champions, once again putting St. Catharines on the national basketball map. And their President of Operations, Michelle Biskup—our Sportsperson of the Year—is a true trailblazer, the first woman to lead a Canadian men's professional franchise to a championship.

The Niagara Ironbacks made history as the first Canadian franchise in the Perfect Game Collegiate Baseball League,



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

launching right here at George Taylor Field—a name that reflects the hardworking spirit of this region.

The IceDogs brought playoff hockey back to St. Catharines for the first time since 2019—and are gearing up for another run with game 1 against Barrie tomorrow night.

The Falcons pushed all the way to the Sutherland Cup finals in 2025, and they kick off the second round of this year's playoff against Fort Erie in the coming days.

The Jr. Athletics hosted the Minto Cup – the National Junior A Lacrosse Championship - right downtown—a world-class event that showcased our deep roots in lacrosse, and a shout out to Paul Coates and the team for all their hard work.

And the Saints—our newest franchise—are here thanks to Pat Smith's dogged determination to bring Senior A hockey back to our city.

But it's not just on the field or the ice.

At the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre, we kicked off a 10th anniversary that reflects a decade of impact—6,700 performances, nearly one million attendees, and more than



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

\$7.5 million invested in world-class programming. It's a true community hub.

The Meridian Centre continues to do the same—hosting concerts, comedy, and sport—bringing thousands of people downtown and driving economic activity and vibrancy in the heart of our city.

Our Public Library continues to create welcoming spaces and bring people together—from ReadSTC to One Read, One STC book club—and we're looking forward to welcoming Terry Fallis as we read *The Marionette* later on this year.

A lot of this happens in our downtown, where the momentum is real.

We saw 45 new businesses open this past year. The Downtown Association has stepped up—tripling the flower program, expanding seasonal activations, adding a full-time maintenance presence, and supporting the Welcoming Streets Initiative. That work matters—not just for appearance, but for confidence in our core.

And finally, the Lincoln and Welland Regiment.



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

We've strengthened the connection between the City and our regiment, and we'll continue that work with a commemorative crosswalk at the Lake Street Armoury. St. Catharines has a proud tradition of supporting our armed forces, and the Links and Winks remain a vital part of who we are—serving at home and abroad.

When you step back and look at all of this—our institutions, our teams, our businesses, our partners—you see something bigger.

You see a city that is active, is building, and is showing up – Again and again.

That is something worth being proud of.

Another priority for this Council term is public safety—an issue that touches everyone, from the City and its partners to businesses and residents alike.

And when I talk about public safety, I think it's important to be clear about roles and responsibilities. Many areas fall outside the City's mandate. Policing rests with the Niagara Regional Police. Social services and affordable housing are the responsibility of the Region and the Province.



But we made a decision: we would focus on what we *can* control—and we would act. And we’ve seen some pretty significant results.

Our public space use bylaw, introduced last spring and enforced in the fall after an education period, was not without controversy. I won’t repeat the criticisms—but it demonstrated the emotion wrapped up in these issues, and Council had to weigh a lot of different opinions before taking action.

But the results speak for themselves. Six months after full implementation, we’ve gone from 92 active encampments on public property, to 2 as of yesterday morning.

Where encampments were too close to homes, playgrounds, or schools, individuals were required to move—something we simply could not do before, as our hands were tied by the courts. Where individuals complied with the bylaw, they were able to remain until appropriate shelter space, through the Region, was identified.

And through the processes implemented by City staff, that space *was* identified. As a result, we’ve been able to return our parks and public spaces to a condition where the entire community can enjoy them once again.



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

Now, I'm not flying a "Mission Accomplished" banner – we know the warm weather will bring renewed challenges. There is still a *lot* of work to do, particularly when it comes to supportive housing and ensuring shelter is available in the coldest months of the year.

But where the City has authority, we are taking action to restore a sense of safety.

That's why we worked with downtown business owners to build a Downtown Stabilization Plan, and committed \$500,000 to it.

That's why we used tools within the Municipal Act to decisively shut down a high-impact illegal drug house in the downtown core, and are exploring how to use that authority elsewhere.

That's why we are continuing to push our partners at the Niagara Regional Police for a stronger presence on our streets, including the potential for a downtown storefront.

We are taking these steps—alongside everything else I've talked about—because the potential of this city is too great to leave to chance, or to inaction.



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

This city wasn't built by standing still. It was built by people willing to take risks, to try new things, and to step forward; even when it wasn't easy.

And when we do that—when we act, when we lead, when we put ourselves out there—we create something better for everyone in our community.

Our tourism efforts are one of the clearest examples of that mindset in action. I mentioned the Minto Cup a few minutes ago—but that was just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to what we're doing in the sports tourism space.

Over the past year alone, St. Catharines hosted the World Junior Golf Championships at the St. Catharines Golf and Country Club. We welcomed the FireFit World Championships to Seymour-Hannah. More than 400 athletes competed in the Ontario Parasport Games.

And coming up in just a few days—and I'll admit, I didn't know this was even a thing—we're hosting the Provincial Dodgeball Championships.

That range of events—provincial, national, international—doesn't happen by accident. It builds on a reputation we've



earned over time, from hosting the Canada Games to the World Rowing Championships to the IIHF U18 Women's Worlds. Time and again, we've shown that St. Catharines knows how to do sports tourism—and do it right.

But when those visitors come to town—for a tournament, a game, or a concert—what do they experience?

For starters, a culinary scene that has absolutely taken off.

We'll always have our favourites—Wellington Court, Bolete, Kully's, the Merch. (I just had their bologna and pimento cheese sandwich—proof that simple still hits the spot.) But alongside those staples is a new wave of standout spots like OddBird, Beechwood Doughnuts, and Pharmacii that are raising the bar.

And then there's Fat Rabbit, earning national attention this past year, landing on Canada's Top 100 list, Michelin's Recommended list, and a number of "best of" rankings across North America. They've expanded, opening Bar Les Incompetents—which is every bit as good.

The truth is, the culinary scene in St. Catharines is so hot right now that the *Toronto Star* named us Ontario's next culinary hotspot.



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

And when you look around—it's not hard to see why.

CULINARY VIDEO

We are blessed with so many incredible businesses in this community.

Over the past year, we've seen major investment and partnership announcements from our home-grown talent. Ontario Shipyards recently announced a new partnership with Hanhwa Ocean—an initiative to build large-scale shipbuilding capacity in Ontario, while keeping that work rooted right here in St. Catharines as Port Weller continues to hum.

At the Niagara District Airport, we've seen real momentum as it pushes forward with expansion and modernization. Under the leadership of Dan Pilon, a new master plan is charting a path to grow services and better serve the Niagara population. Whether inbound or outbound, initiatives like the new Air Canada landline service show the airport is doing everything it can to increase capacity from YCM. That plan positions the airport as a key piece of the province's Destination Niagara strategy—and a major driver of our tourism future here in St. Catharines.



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

And as we continue to push for expanded GO service—toward all-day, two-way trips to Union Station—we can't forget about Hoverlink.

When I first heard about a hovercraft crossing Lake Ontario, I'll admit—I was skeptical. But I've watched Chris Morgan take that idea and steadily bring it closer to reality. With big milestones expected in the coming year, I'm excited to see where Hoverlink can take us—literally and economically.

Because at the end of the day, we are a community that is growing. And part of that growth means City Hall listening—really listening—to what our business community needs.

We have to keep making this an easier place to do business.

That's why another priority at City Hall has been affordability.

We had to make some tough decisions early in this term—coming out of COVID, facing inflation near 9%, and drawing heavily on reserves just to steady the ship. But we didn't shy away from those decisions—we made them.



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

One of the most important steps we took was implementing multi-year budgeting. It held staff accountable for the decisions they make, and it held Council accountable to the community—that we would not drift into spending outside of a clear, disciplined plan.

And the results speak for themselves. Over the past three years, we've brought City tax increases down to some of the lowest levels in Ontario among municipalities our size.

But we didn't stop there. I called for a Core Services review, followed by Value for Money audits, which are now underway. The goal is straightforward: compare how we spend to municipalities like ours—similar size, similar structure—and identify where we're spending more, and whether we need to change how we deliver services.

Because if we're asking residents to pay more, we owe them a clear answer as to why.

And I've been clear at the Region as well—where budget pressures continue year after year—that the only way to find real savings and regain control over spending is to take the same approach.



That means a Core Services review. That means Value for Money audits. That means honestly asking where we differ from other regional systems across Ontario—and why.

Because tinkering around the edges of the Regional budget will not get us where we need to go. And it won't allow us to invest in the things that matter most—supportive housing, programs needed to help people get off the street and into stability, and economic development that gives people the jobs they need to stay in their homes in the first place.

Alright . . .

Let's bring this home with a few more of the awesome accomplishments we've gotten to celebrate this past year.

We've celebrated major anniversaries across the City, with companies as diverse as the Nitsopolous family and Heart of Niagara hotels, to the Furniture Gallery, to Niagara Precision all celebrating 50 year anniversaries.

CIBC in our downtown core beat the City to the punch by celebrating their 150th just a few months before we celebrated ours.



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

We've also seen our city's excellence recognized across a range of arenas, from the Governor General's Medal in Architecture for the Neil Campbell Rowing Centre, to a national award from the Economic Development Association of Canada for marketing excellence in economic development.

We also celebrated our Fire Chief! Chief Dave Upper was recognized just a few months ago as the 2026 Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs Fire Chief of the Year. If you know the Chief, you know he's a dedicated guy who cares deeply about this community. It's great to see him recognized by others the way we all know him to be.

These accolades highlight the talent, creativity, and dedication that make St. Catharines a standout community.

Last summer at my annual golf tournament, I was sitting talking to Paul Speck and Noel Buckley - two incredible gentleman who have never failed to support me. We were discussing city business, and I was getting into some of the more contentious topics we deal with; at the end of the conversation, Noel said "you're doing a great job, Mayor. I don't know how you do it."



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

And while I appreciate the support, and understand the sentiment, the truth is that for all of the difficult debates, the frustrations and the concerns, this job has been most rewarding because of the vision we all share for St. Catharines - a vibrant city, prosperous in different ways, and a place where all of us can choose to live, build our lives and our families, and thrive while doing so

In 2025—and throughout this entire term of Council—we didn't wait.

We didn't wait for perfect conditions. We didn't wait for certainty. We didn't wait for someone else to act.

We moved.

We got homes built.

We supported our business community.

We welcomed new talent to St. Catharines.

And in doing so, we laid the foundation—not just for today—but for the next 150 years of this city's history.



The Corporation of
the City of
St. Catharines

Mat Siscoe
Mayor

And because we chose action over hesitation, we are seeing that growth take hold once again.

This city is rooted in our common ground. It's what supports us. It's what connects us. And it's what will carry us forward into whatever this community needs us to become.

I'm grateful for the support this community has given me. I hope I've earned your trust over these past four years—and I'm committed to continuing that work in the years ahead.

Because the story of St. Catharines has never been about waiting for the future.

It's about building it—together.