

Mayor Walter Sendzik
City of St. Catharines Inaugural Address 2014
Royal Canadian Legion Polish Veterans Branch
Monday, December 1, 2014

Good evening, distinguished guests, family, friends, ladies and gentlemen – it is my great honour to welcome you to the inaugural meeting for the 2014 – 2018 council of the city of St. Catharines.

I stand here today truly humbled, yet grateful for the trust the people of this great city have bestowed on me.

But, I do not stand alone.

Beside me have been my family, friends and supporters. The people who share in the vision that we can build a city in which our children and grandchildren can have a bright, prosperous future in their hometown.

No one stands taller by my side than my beautiful wife Melanie. I would not be here without her unwavering support and belief that I have the skills and experience to have a positive impact on the future of our city. Thank you for believing in me, for encouraging me and for challenging me on those days when I didn't think the impossible was possible.

My motivation as mayor is simple. It's with Melanie and I every night at our dinner table. I want my daughter Ella and my son Willem to have a future right here. They are my motivation. My promise is that I will deliver for them and I will deliver for you.

I would like to thank my family – my parents Vivian and Ted Sendzik, and my sister Sue, and my brothers Brian and Andrew and their families for a lifetime of support and love.

And to my campaign team – what a team! – You are why I am standing here today. I will never be able to completely express my gratitude for your efforts – but we were united and driven by a vision – a vision that transcends ideology – one that is rooted in a belief our city can become a leader in Ontario,

That we can make a difference in the lives of those around us

And that we can build a city that is compassionate, sustainable and prosperous.

Clearly this vision is shared by so many of you in our community.

I would like to take a moment to thank all the councilors who are not returning from the previous council and who served our city with such commitment over

the years. Your efforts did not go unnoticed – our community truly appreciates your public service.

On behalf of the people of St. Catharines, I would like to personally and sincerely thank Mayor Brian McMullan for his 26 years of public service – including the past 8 years as the tireless leader of this city. The city has made great strides over the past eight years with a significant amount of public investments into new buildings and infrastructure – and while Brian often talks about the team behind him – it was his leadership that ensured so many projects were approved and completed.

Thank you Brian.

And I would like to congratulate the returning and new councillors. I think the people of St. Catharines have elected a strong team – and I am looking forward to working with each of you over the next four years.

Today, I stand before you because our city – and indeed our region – is at a crossroads.

This is our reality.

The Conference Board of Canada gave St. Catharines-Niagara a 'D' based on our economy, innovation and education.

We stand 134th of 200 cities in Canada when measured by our economy.

Unfortunately, for the better part of the past two decades, our community has borne the brunt of global shifts in large-scale manufacturing and its impact can be seen in the vacant industrial properties across our city – including the 53 acres of property on Ontario St. That once employed more than 7,000 people.

The loss of business has shifted the costs of city services to our residents – some of whom are finding it more and more difficult to make ends meet.

With continuing high unemployment, lack of career opportunities for young people, and an uncompetitive marketplace to attract new investments, we are in jeopardy of losing another decade of economic growth.

Let me be clear – I am immensely proud of my hometown – and I know you are as well - but falling further behind is no longer an option.

We are in a global fight;

For business,

For talent,

For innovation and

For private sector investments.

And we are going to be winners in the fight.

We have an opportunity to be a city that not only competes in the new global economy – but leads in it.

Think of this:

We are centrally located along one of the largest economic corridors in North America.

We are a transportation hub that links two countries by road, rail and water.

We have Brock University and Niagara College – both investing in research-based learning that will create the next generation of business concepts and ideas.

We have a new state of the art hospital, Brock's soon-to-be open Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine & Performing Arts school in downtown St. Catharines along with a new performing arts centre and the Meridian Centre.

We have the assets to be a leading city and you have elected me and this council to harness the power of business to fully realize our potential.

My promise is that St. Catharines will be a place in which businesses can grow and expand.

We will be a city that attracts businesses – creating new employment opportunities – and with them a stronger, more robust and diversified economy.

My mission is for our city to be seen as a place that rivals growing cities like Burlington, Guelph and Kitchener-Waterloo when it comes to attracting private sector investment.

I will not settle for a 'D' – I will not accept 134th.

And I know that you won't

Now is the time for action – bold and swift.

We need one inter-municipal regional transit system – not three independently operated city transit commissions. We are a decade behind other regional economies when it comes to transit – and we can't wait another four years to catch up.

We will be relentless in our pursuit for daily go commuter train service to Niagara – not in four years, not in two years – but next year. It's time the Ontario government recognized we are a part of the greater Toronto – Hamilton economy.

Port Dalhousie's commercial core will be rebuilt. We will not accept its current state. A new Port will rise that will act as a beacon on the shores of Lake Ontario – attracting people and business to our community.

We will work with the owners of the former hospital sites on Queenston Street and Ontario Street to expedite the redevelopments – creating jobs, new living and employment spaces and breathing new life into those neighbourhoods.

We will work closely with the new owners of the former General Motors site on Ontario Street to rebuild a significant part of our city. Recognizing that the space will no longer be a place of industrial employment – it can be a catalyst that drives the future of our economy.

And we will work with the private sector in downtown St. Catharines to attract new businesses to the vacant offices and to build new living spaces that bring more people into the core of our city.

All this we can do –we must do.

And while I am committed to the economic redevelopment of our city – and I am equally committed to the social wellbeing of our citizens.

It was in this hall a few years back when I was approached by an older gentleman who asked if I was from the Sendziks on facer street – and when I said I was – he went on to tell a story about how my great grandmother provided food on credit for his family during the depression – and he recalled how she helped so many families during those difficult times.

I was so proud and honored listening to that story.

My great grandmother not only made a home for her children in a new country, she gave to those around her to help build a community – giving so much when no doubt she didn't have much to give. What a lesson for me.

I learned that's how communities are built – by investing in each other – supporting each other – and realizing that together – we are stronger – and we can surmount the most difficult challenges facing us.

That is why I am committed to forming a mayor's advisory council focused on addressing the root causes of poverty in our community.

No child should go hungry, no family should be pulled apart by the lack of economic opportunity, and no person should be left in the cold – fighting to survive.

The council will be empowered to develop an action plan that utilizes all the tools we have at our collective disposal to ensure there is enough for everyone in our community.

And I have said this many times during my campaign - a home is not just the place in which we raise our family,

It's the streets where our kids play road hockey,

It's the sidewalks where our kids learned how to ride their bike,

It's the arenas, parks, trails and community centres that allow people – young and old - to come together and create new and lasting friendships.

That's why we will have a comprehensive recreation master plan completed in 2015 that will guide council in the coming years when it comes to rebuilding our aging recreation facilities.

And as a council, we will move on the development and completion of a transportation master plan to ensure people can move around this city in more than just a vehicle.

And it's time for the city's culture plan to be completed. We have invested significantly in the infrastructure to support the arts – and now it's time to encourage and support the creative minds in our community.

Today, I stand on this stage with a group of people who are committed to putting residents first - ensuring that city hall listens to and solves their questions and concerns.

Who are committed to building a city in which young people see St. Catharines as a place in which they can find gainful employment, establish a rewarding career and start a family.

Who are committed to building a city in which families are able to enjoy an outstanding quality of life – and a city in, which families of all backgrounds can afford to call home.

And who are committed to building a city that keeps extended families closer together – where those that built our city – and are now enjoying retirement – are

able to afford to live in their homes, and are able to see their grandchildren growing up.

I am truly looking forward to working with council, city staff and our community as we seize the opportunities that are just within reach - putting St. Catharines back on the map – and in doing so – bringing pride – the best kind of pride - hometown pride – back to our city.

Thank for you again for bestowing in me the trust to lead our great city.

I will conclude with a quote from George Bernard Shaw:

"The reasonable man adapts himself to the conditions that surround him...
The unreasonable man adapts surrounding conditions to himself...
All progress depends on the unreasonable man."

Thank you