

Inaugural Address 2014 | Monday 1 December | 7:00 p.m.

Welcome everyone to the inaugural meeting of City Council for the 2014 to 2018 term – the first four year term in White Rock.

Greetings to the families and friends of all the elected members of council who have been able to make it tonight. I am going to take this opportunity to also specially thank my family who have been so supportive of me through this past three years and, most particularly, my wife Jane who has stood beside me and been such a help and now has to do it for another four years.

A special thanks to all those invited guests who have taken the time to join us for this evening. We are honoured by your presence.

I believe it is important to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the two councillors from the past term who will not be moving forward with us in this term – Al Campbell and Louise Hutchinson.

Both Al and Louise were outspoken and passionate about the city and continually worked very hard for its betterment. I shall miss their input, their humour, and their strong work ethic. They both led by example and contributed greatly to our community.

I want to thank the voters who have elected me as your mayor for this term. I promise you I will continue to do my best to provide you with good governance and leadership over the next four years.

Finally, I would also like to thank the voters for electing a strong council that I believe will be able to work cohesively and constructively for the city for this term.

That does not mean to say that there will be unanimous votes on all issues. To the contrary, I believe that, particularly on key matters, we should consider all sides of the issue before coming to a decision. I will be encouraging debate so that we are able to benefit from different perspectives before we vote. However, once the vote is done it must be recognized that a decision of council has been made and we have to go with that.

Planning and Development

The voters have given a strong mandate to this council to encourage controlled growth in this city. The immediate challenge for this council will be to put limits on the growth and control the rate of change.

One of the priorities we will have is to review certain aspects of the Official Community Plan to ensure that speculation is contained and people have an understanding of any growth potential there might be. We will also be reviewing the zoning bylaws to proactively and effectively deal with the matter of “monster houses” and coach houses in the single family zones.

Growth and change are two constants in our lives. If you have studied microbiology or have listened to David Suzuki, you will know that an organism that ceases to grow or multiply and ceases to be able to adapt to change will fail and die.

So it is with cities.

We must learn to accept and control growth because it is a fact of life. White Rock's growth is very small and manageable – about 120 to 150 people or three to four per cent a year – and we want to keep it that way.

Rail Relocation

Another priority of this council will be to deal with the matter of the removal of dangerous goods and the train tracks from our waterfront. I will be the first to admit this will be no easy task, but it is doable and it is one I am determined to take on and do the best I can to accomplish.

To this end I can tell you I have already started discussions with neighbouring municipalities and will be pursuing our cause with relevant U.S. cities, senior governments, business organizations, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, citizen groups, and the like, in order to put together a viable business case for this undertaking.

Purchase of the Water Utility

A third priority of this council will be to finalize the purchase of the water utility from EPCOR. EPCOR is an extremely competent operator of the facility – there can be no doubt of that. But the prospect of well over a million dollars a year leaving our taxpayers' pockets to help keep the city of Edmonton's property taxes down is just not acceptable. At the end of the day, that is a key driver for this acquisition.

Public Safety

A fourth priority for council will be to maintain our uniquely high level of public safety.

One of the characteristics of our city that distinguishes us from Surrey is the level of fire and police protection we enjoy. There is a cost to this - and to a degree it makes our taxes higher than Surrey's taxes. However, the level of responsiveness, the "no call too small" operating standard we maintain, is the result of a strong, sustained investment – one that greatly benefits us all.

We will not let that be compromised.

Arts, Culture and Events

A fifth priority is that we will be continuing to promote arts and culture in the community. We want arts and culture to become a real economic generator for us.

Over the past three years there has been a definite increase in festivals as a way of celebrating and promoting arts and culture in our community. We want to sustain these events and build upon them for the next four years.

New events such as the Moon Festival and Diwali have served to highlight our diversity.

The Sea Festival celebration was on the verge of being lost. But with the encouragement of council, a determined group of community volunteers came forward to revive it, and did so in spectacular fashion this past summer.

Our two-month long art festival which culminated with the celebration of the International Artist Day, has had two successful years and continues to get better and better.

For two consecutive years now, we have been the beneficiaries of the month long Irish festival in the spring – when Irish eyes are smiling.

Our staff has been able to organize two spectacular ad hoc events – the RCMP musical ride in 2013 and the Snowbird Airshow in 2014 through the auspices of the CH.I.L.D foundation and our very own Scott Harrold, one of the foundation directors.

For the past six years, Liv Butow and her board of directors have put on the celebration of Christmas on the Peninsula at the Community Centre. This one day event marks the kick-off of the Christmas festivities for the Peninsula. This years' celebration was probably the best-attended one of the six notwithstanding the cold weather.

This spirit of involvement and reluctance to let traditions die has prompted the Rotary Club along with the Semiahmoo Peninsula's Royal Canadian Marine Rescue Society to take on the organization of the annual polar bear swim from the Monarch Lions Club, who after 44 years are no longer able to sustain it.

It is this spirit of giving and involvement that really makes our community great.

Businesses

Sixth , this council will work to actively seek out new businesses to come and fill our empty stores so we can provide better services for our residents and a more robust and sustainable tax base for the community. To this end we will work with our existing businesses, the BIA, the Chamber of Commerce, and Tourism White Rock to accomplish our goal.

It is worthwhile to note that council recently recognized 53 businesses or enterprises, still active in the city, that have been in business for more than 25 years. That is quite amazing, and shows what you can do when you consistently provide good service combined with a good product. Chief among those

businesses was Penguin Meats with 50 years, the White Rock Players Club with 60 years, and White Rock Travel with 62 years in business. Absolutely remarkable!

Finance

I would like to take a moment to briefly reflect on the city's financial situation, because it was frequently called into question during the election.

So, just to set the record straight once and for all. White Rock is in excellent shape financially – better by far than many municipalities.

We have been setting money aside in reserves for planned infrastructure and equipment replacement. We are one of the few municipalities that have no debt. Our per capita spending for municipal services is below the regional average.

We do have the fourth highest residential taxes in the region, but that is not due to out of control spending. It is due in large part to the fact that we have such a small commercial tax base. The average for the region is 40 per cent and ours is 11 per cent.

So any thought that we are in dire financial straits is totally without merit.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to say, we have in place an engaged, hard-working, talented senior management team to do the work and an enthusiastic, eager, and dedicated elected council. I have every reason to believe this will be a productive, progressive four years for us.

But, nobody has ever done very well in trying to drive a car by looking only in the rear view mirror.

To a very large degree that was what this election was all about. Do we try to live in the past or do we move ahead? The public's choice was very clear.

They want us to drive the car by looking at the road ahead while being aware of what is happening around us. However, we must occasionally check the rearview mirror to see where we have been and to help make the necessary course corrections along the way.

That is how your city is going to be governed for the next four years.

Thank you
Mayor Wayne Baldwin.