

Mayor Brian McMullan  
Tale of Two Cities  
Club Roma, Jan. 28, 2011

Thank you for the introduction. I'm pleased to be here today for this Tale of Two Cities event being hosted by the St. Catharines Thorold Chamber of Commerce.

Welcome Chamber of Commerce members, special guests, and members of Council and City staff here today.

In attendance from City Council are: Councillors Jeff Burch, Mark Elliott, Len Stack, Dawn Dodge, Bill Phillips, Mat Siscoe, and Matt Harris.

We also have senior staff: CAO Colin Briggs and Recreational and Community Services Director Rick Lane – as well as a number of support staff who have joined us here today.

It gives me great pleasure to share with you what our City is doing to diversify our economy, support local businesses and encourage private sector confidence in our community which in turn will lead to more investment and job creation.

Before I get too far into my address today, I would like to take a moment to show a short film about St. Catharines, produced by Fourgrounds Media Inc., which highlights how our community is evolving and continues to grow.

Fourgrounds Media was founded by two Brock University graduates and was among the first companies to specialize in interactive media in the region.

They have grown to employ seven full-time staff, and up to 12 part-time employees, depending on the production. It's one of many examples of how our community is evolving and opportunities are being created for a new knowledge-based economy.

I present to you a film they created for the City of St. Catharines...

Show film

(In this film) You see some of our unsung heroes, thank you for helping us to produce this film.

The City of St. Catharines is seeing unprecedented public investment in our community and those projects we are pursuing are setting the stage for a vibrant future.

St. Catharines is headed in the right direction and we are seeing visible signs of progress.

We are beginning to see our collective hard work take shape.

The plans are coming together, construction is happening, buildings are going up ... and the excitement and anticipation is growing.

There is \$1.6 billion worth of economic activity from public investments in recreation, culture and traditional infrastructure happening in our community, right now.

And this investment I speak of isn't something that's coming – it's already here.

Some of the investments in our community include:

- St. Catharines Health Care Complex and Cancer Centre
- Cairns Family Health and Bioscience Complex (Brock University)
- Downtown Performing Arts Centre
- Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts
- Carlisle Street Parking Garage
- Kiwanis Aquatics Centre and Grantham branch of the St. Catharines Public Library
- Brock University International Services Building
- Q.E.W. Expansion
- Downtown two-way traffic
- Kiwanis Artificial Turf Field
- Generator at One nGen expansion

These projects have gone from a dream to a reality.

As you drive past Fourth Ave., you can see the outer shell of what will become our new hospital and will house new regional services including a family cancer centre, cardiac services, longer term mental health, and continued development of regional dialysis.

To encourage people to visit our downtown businesses and restaurants, we are constructing the Carlisle Street Parking Garage. It's welcomed news and will help alleviate parking concerns, which have been an issue for residents and businesses alike.

Recently, demolition kicked off our Downtown Performing Arts Centre project which will compliment Brock University's Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts.

Once completed, it will bring new life, talent and professionals to our downtown core.

This month, the Arts Centre Task Force will be making a recommendation to Council on a preferred architect for this project.

Once an architect has been selected, the project will move to the design phase and the public engagement process will begin and we look forward to the invaluable input our residents who can contribute as we move forward.

We are starting to see tangible examples of the positive approach we have taken to overcome challenges and build a better St. Catharines.

These are indeed exciting times.

I often say the best is yet to come. The vision that I and Council, along with so many of you, have shared has started to become a reality.

Over the past four years, the City has invested more than \$39 million in projects that will help anchor and transform St. Catharines.

As said by Alexander Graham Bell: “When one door closes another door opens; but we so often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door, that we do not see the ones which open for us.”

We have been able to build on our partnerships with other levels of government and educational institutions including Brock University, Niagara College, and McMaster University.

And we are not alone in our pursuit to make St. Catharines a better place.

Public investment in our community helps to foster private sector confidence which in turn enhances our ability to grow and prosper.

Private investment has always brought about greater innovation, ingenuity, and creates new jobs.

It is our goal to leverage those public dollars and bring additional development and investment to St. Catharines. It is another piece of the foundation we are building for a prosperous future.

St. Catharines shouldn't be Niagara's best kept secret - and with all the activity in our community I suspect it won't be.

Our Economic Development and Tourism Services office is fielding inquires like never before - investors with potential new projects and developments are seeking information about St. Catharines and what we have to offer.

Good things are on the horizon. The momentum is building and all the pieces to the puzzle are falling into place.

Building permit values in St. Catharines have skyrocketed over the past two years. In 2009 – the construction value was more than \$143 million and in 2010, construction value was more than \$721million – that’s almost three and a quarter of a billion dollars in that one year alone.

In years past, we typically see construction values at the \$100 million mark.

People want to be inspired.

Inspiration is what drives us to create a new vision, embark on a new path and take action when others may have let opportunities pass by.

I am inspired by our rich history, the challenges we have overcome and our many strengths.

The level of commitment this Council has shown and the residents who have put their faith in our vision to make this, our Garden City, an innovative leader – has also been inspirational for me.

We, as a government, know public investment alone doesn't create jobs. But what we can do as a City is create the right environment to nurture future growth.

Despite the downturn in the economy, many businesses have been able to weather the storm. We have also seen new businesses come to our community.

In 2010, we were pleased to welcome New Food Classics here as the company has selected The Garden City as the preferred re-location of their business from the province of Alberta.

New Food Classics will support local food processing, create 150 jobs for our skilled workforce and has the potential to generate up to 400 jobs in the future.

Trenergy Inc. has invested \$1.6 million into a 15,000 square-foot rebuild and Kaupp Electric has invested \$600,000 to build an addition of 4,000 sq-ft – both businesses have also improved their energy efficiency.

We also have Biolyse Pharma Corp. which celebrated the opening of its multimillion dollar “clean room” high-tech production facility at its Wellandvale Rd. lab.

The federally-licensed production room allows Biolyse to produce, package and conduct its own quality control on its medicines, including its innovative cancer treatment drug.

We should also note VinFirst Innovative Packaging which invested \$1.4 million to expand its product line of “ready-to-drink” alcoholic beverages in Tetra Pak Aseptic cartons. The project included an addition of 2,500 square feet to accommodate new processing equipment which enables the company to increase its workforce by 30 per cent.

VinFirst Innovative Packaging continues to be the only facility in North America that exclusively co-packs for the alcohol industry in the environmentally friendly cartons. Over 70 per cent of the Tetra cartons in the LCBO are produced right here in the City of St. Catharines.

Another great news story came from General Motors of Canada which approved an investment of \$235 million to prepare its plant to produce the next generation of highly fuel-efficient small block engines.

GM also announced its plant would produce a new fuel-efficient six-speed transmission which required further investment of \$245 million and again is helping to maintain jobs here in our community.

We have also welcomed the new Performance Hyundai dealership to Ontario Street – the site employs 35 individuals and features 14 service bays.

Krisros' new 30,000 square-foot manufacturing facility will assist in the company's already solid reputation of servicing the architectural metal industry's needs. This company made an investment of \$2 million and this move is expected to create 25 to 30 new jobs.

The Quality Hotel Parkway and Convention Centre is another example of renewed confidence in this community. Plans include remodeling and re-naming it to the Holiday Inn and Suites – an \$8 million investment.

The goal is to provide accommodation requirements in St. Catharines well into the future. And, in response to community need, the Nitsopoulos family will also be changing their Holiday Inn location on Lake Street to a Best Western.

And now, I can say we are all inspired – not just by public investment - but private investment that often goes unnoticed.

As our downtown is transformed back into its bustling self - we not only enhance the quality of life for our citizens, but we support existing businesses and make room for new development.

It's a transformation that doesn't happen overnight, but is building momentum.

This is a community that is creating opportunities for our young, bright and talented leaders of tomorrow.

With Brock University's Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts, or the McMaster Degroote School of Medicine, the new Niagara Regional Health complex or even nGen - the career opportunities for our new knowledge-based economy are being formed.

As Niagara's largest urban centre we should be proud of what we have accomplished.

For it is our people and our unwillingness to sit idly by, that has allowed us make the most of these opportunities.

Despite the economy, we did not dwell on what we once were - we decided to be proactive. We did what we could to support existing businesses and opened our eyes to the potential new opportunities on the horizon, those yet to be realized.

With the economy, our community was able to seek government support to make record investments that are unprecedented in the history of St. Catharines.

We know these dollars are your dollars. We made decisions based on how best to leverage those dollars to encourage future private investment.

As said, by one of our legendary hockey players - Wayne Gretzky - "You miss 100 percent of the shots you never take."

Change can be difficult. But if you can imagine it, you can achieve it in right here in the city of St. Catharines.

There will be critics along the way - but once these opportunities are realized and these new facilities are open, I have faith that even those who thought it couldn't be done will see the benefits that were envisioned from the start.

We also want to ensure people to know City Hall is open for business. To that end, we're developing new ways of doing business with the public.

Among the initiatives to enhance our customer service, which will start this spring, is an expedited approach to permitting for things like pools or sheds.

Our staff will also provide awareness and education on the required standards for residential projects such as fencing

With applications online and the new process we are proposing, it will also allow people to arrive at City Hall with their application in hand and the approvals required to build their project once they leave.

A one stop shop, one interaction with staff ...

Our hope is that we can make the process easier for the average homeowner looking to make enhancements to their properties.

We are also looking at ways to enhance how we interact with the public with an overall plan to centralize our service centre – a concept that has been adopted in other municipalities.

It means the public can access our services in one location. This summer we expect to have a staff report detailing the requirements to make this customer service desk a reality.

Another positive initiative on the horizon – as a result of our conversion to two-way traffic, revitalization efforts and partnership with the Wine Council of Ontario – is the Wine Route which will soon be travelling through our downtown core.

And, as we move forward Council continues to look at ways to enhance our infrastructure, improve the quality of life for residents, encourage more tourism, and bring more high-calibre sports and entertainment to our community.

That's why we have made a decision to begin a feasibility study for a new spectator facility.

The reality is Jack Gatecliff arena is more than 72 years old and it has served this community well but does not fulfill our needs into the future.

We are undertaking a comprehensive study which will provide us with a more accurate depiction of the structural capability of the building.

At that point, we will have a better understanding of our options.

We are being cautious when it comes to sinking more money into this arena and are looking for a long-term solution that ensures we have the required facilities for our future generations to use and enjoy.

Just as our leaders did in 1930s, we have the same obligation to future generations.

We recognize the importance of being fiscally responsible – that there is a need to consider all funding options including, but not limited to, a public-private partnership.

We will consider all the options before moving forward.

Another project we are hoping the Region will explore is for the 68 Church Street facility is for it to house the NRP detachment, Provincial Offences officers and add potential residential units to create more downtown housing.

We may not have been able to keep our headquarters here but as we move forward we will work with the Region as plans begin to take shape. The fact the Region is prepared to consider housing ... is an exciting opportunity.

What we are all witnessing together is a miraculous transformation in this community. We are building the foundation for a prosperous future.

It's about building a future for our children and our children's children.

If we continue on this path, we know the results will be positive. Investment is already on our doorstep. Change will come.

Can we do it? Yes we can.