

MAYOR SAM KATZ

2008 STATE OF THE CITY SPEECH

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I want to begin by thanking Ken Jones and Dave Angus for carrying on a tradition we started last year; a tradition that honours someone whose spirit continues to make a tremendous impact in our city.

Once again, proceeds from every ticket purchased for this luncheon will go towards carrying on the legacy of Reverend Harry Lehotsky through New Life Ministries. I would like to acknowledge Virginia Lehotsky and her son Jared, who are joining us here today.

Thank you for your contribution.

Civic politics is more than just the mayor. And it has been a privilege to work with all members of council for another year to deliver on your priorities.

I'd like to acknowledge councillors:

Jeff Browaty
Bill Clement
Scott Fielding
Jenny Gerbasi
Harry Lazarenko
Brenda Leipsic
Grant Nordman
Mike O' Shaughnessy
Mike Pagtakhan
Harvey Smith
Gord Steeves,
Justin Swandel,
Lillian Thomas;
Dan Vandal and
Russ Wyatt.

I have shared my vision in previous years of building a city of opportunity, saying Yes to a Winnipeg that is building on its momentum, and a city that knows it's priorities must be fixing and re-investing in our crumbling infrastructure.

So what's been going on at City Hall this year?

We made the reduction of red tape a priority.

I insisted we would work to implement all the Red Tape Commission's 30 recommendations, and set a one-year countdown to give us a deadline to strive for.

In 2006, we only acted on 7 recommendations.

I challenged Transcona Councillor, Russ Wyatt, with the critical task of implementing the recommendations of this nationally acclaimed document.

Today, we've taken action on all 30 – some more fully than others.

Finally, change for the better is working its way into the daily routine at City Hall.

I can't pretend we've wiped out all the red tape at City Hall, but I believe if Noah was going to build an ark in Winnipeg, he could do so without being caught up in permits, regulations, and bureaucracy.

We are shifting to a cleaner streamlined zoning bylaw, a simpler License Bylaw with 50% fewer licenses.

We are continuing work on 311 to make communication with the City of Winnipeg more accessible and accountable – to you, our customer.

Our public service has been working to have 311 up and running in January 2009.

And I would like to congratulate the public service and Councillor Wyatt for making this happen.

Council has increased its investment in roads and bridges, recreational walkways and bike paths by more than 450%. To be precise, the city has invested an additional \$147 million into our infrastructure since 2004.

We have spent a great deal of time addressing longstanding and hidden problems in the City.

Including the City's disjointed relationship with its water utility. In 2004, I was the only Mayoral candidate to raise the issue of water rates and transfers to general revenue, and backed that with a commitment to make that relationship more transparent to you the taxpayer.

I appreciate council's support in changing this antiquated and irresponsible practice.

But unfortunately, most of our water and sewer headaches are beyond our control, thanks to the Clean Environment Commission's recommendation to accelerate \$1.2 billion dollars in wastewater improvements, without regard for the city's ability to pay.

So this spring, EPC and Council will explore how to change our approach to the water utility so it becomes a 'real' utility, free to seek out customers, free from day-to-day financial or political interference, and with a clear, transparent financial relationship that can stand up to scrutiny from the Public Utility Board.

I have weighed the economic benefits of lower taxes against the equal challenge of paying for core essential services.

It's a challenge when construction costs are soaring higher and faster than ever before.

It's even tougher when many agencies and lobby groups treat the City of Winnipeg as their bank of first resort, time and time again.

It's like the preacher who asked, "God, how long is 10 million years to you?" God replied, "1 second." The next day the preacher asked, "How much is 10 million dollars to you?" And God replied, "A penny."

Finally the next day the preacher asked, "God, can I have one of your pennies?" And God replied, "Sure. Just wait a second."

The City has committed to reducing our corporate municipal green house gases by 20% below 1998 levels.

But environmental stewardship doesn't stop when a commitment has been met. I believe that we must continually reevaluate and challenge ourselves to do better.

That is why I committed to achieve an additional 20% reduction in corporate emissions from our original baseline.

This week I brought a motion to EPC to develop a green vehicle plan that encourages anti-idling, purchasing hybrid and fuel efficient vehicles, and a continued emphasis to downsize our city's fleet.

Later this month, I will bring a motion forward to require all future civic buildings to be built to LEED silver equivalent standards.

I applaud St. Norbert Councillor Justin Swandel for addressing the issue of eliminating plastic grocery bags. We will continue to explore ways of reducing plastic bags from filling our landfills and staining our landscape.

I recently appointed Fort Rouge Councillor Jenny Gerbasi as Chair of the Mayor's Environmental Advisory Committee.

She has hit the ground running and is currently working on a plan to engage the public on how we can significantly reduce our emissions at the community level.

It's an important task, and I know she is not one to back away from a challenge.

The city must continue to seize the opportunity to engage Aboriginal youth in a meaningful way.

We will be bringing forward an Aboriginal Youth Strategy by April to harness the potential of our Aboriginal community.

We know there are successful programs that are working. We need to explore more partnerships that demonstrate practical, long-impacting results.

We will continue to work with our community's Aboriginal leaders, in particular Grand Chief Ron Evans, President David Chartrand, and Grand Chief Morris Shannacappo.

Many mayors before me promised to eliminate the job-killing business tax. But I have worked hard delivering on this promise and have reduced the tax city-wide to 7.75%

The City of Edmonton just released a new study on property taxes showing an apples to apples comparison of the total property taxes plus utilities for the average household in large Canadian cities.

It shows Winnipeg as a leader, behind only Surrey and Burnaby as having the lowest property taxes including utilities in Canada. Nearly 20% lower than the national average.

We have remained at the competitive end of this scale by striving to maintain an eleven-year freeze on property tax.

Yes, that's right: eleven years of property tax freezes. Freezes we've maintained while school boards have offset our frozen rates by continually increasing their portion on the tax bill.

Last year, council passed the operating budget unanimously for the first time in 21 years. I know it doesn't make for great headlines, but I am sure taxpayers appreciate our ability to work together.

The good news for the media, is that this year's budget process will likely cause much debate and sell more than a few newspapers.

This year, with rising inflation and stagnant city revenues, it comes as no surprise that it's going to be more difficult for the city to maintain a property tax freeze.

There are some members of council who may believe it is time to end the freeze, and increase our property taxes.

As long as stones remain unturned at City Hall, I will do everything in my power to freeze property taxes this year.

It never ceases to amaze me when I hear criticism that "all City Hall cares about is money."

Putting it simply, taxes pay for action on the priorities that people expect.

In 2006, Deputy Mayor Brenda Leipsic and I promised more transparency when it came to expenditures of elected officials at City Hall.

And the civic government has taken steps to ensure that elected officials are transparent with the dollars they spend.

I am pleased to announce that effective today, council expenses were posted online for the very first time at Winnipeg.ca

But you know what? None of this matters if we do not have a safe city.

I want to spend the majority of today focusing on what we're getting from one very important area of investment, and that's improving public safety and reducing crime in our city.

This past November, the city appointed our new police Chief, Keith McCaskill. This is arguably the most important job in our city.

I know he is looking forward to making a positive impact. And I assure the Chief that I will continue to work with Council to make sure the men and women of the Winnipeg Police Service have our continued support.

When I took office in 2004, Winnipeg was spending \$140 million on our police service.

We currently spend \$160 million dollars on operating costs for the Police. That's 20% of our current operating budget.

That's an increase of almost 14% in three years.

But what are taxpayers getting for their investment?

Some believe if you give an inch, they will think you're a ruler.

Governments must recognize that increased spending without accountability does not solve problems.

There needs to be clear and deliverable results for there to be any value for our tax dollars.

So council approved a Neighbourhood Safety and Crime Prevention strategy, which included the CrimeStat model of policing as a key component.

I attended my first CrimeStat meeting with our new Chief yesterday, to see its first year's progress.

The web portion of CrimeStat provides weekly statistical breakdowns by district in nine categories: homicides, sexual assaults, commercial and personal robberies, commercial, residential and other break-ins, and actual or attempted stolen vehicles.

This data allows the Winnipeg Police Service to target high crime areas and develop strategies to address emerging trends, not at the end of the month, or at year-end, but in real time.

District commanders are held accountable in finding solutions to growing trends in their districts at CrimeStat briefing meetings.

Take one example. In District 4 for the week of November 12th, there was a surge of break and enters, and auto theft.

The district commander accordingly intervened and the police were able to drastically reduce crime by the following week.

Attempted and actual auto thefts were cut in half, while break and enters were reduced to a total of 5 from 22. This is just one snapshot of how CrimeStat functions.

Citizens also use CrimeStat to get a picture of safety in their neighbourhood, and are taking proactive measures to create a safer community.

It's no secret we need to do better. Here is a glimpse of District 3 this past month.

It's not a pretty picture. It's easy to look at this in terms of categories and statistics, but each item is an instance where reckless individuals flout the consequences and tarnish our city.

It's our responsibility to work together and create safer neighbourhoods.

Criminal acts are bound in personal individual responsibility. But the measures to reduce criminal acts are bound in the responsibility of all of us.

Politicians, community leaders, business leaders, residents: we all play a role.

Crime affects our entire city, though it varies by neighbourhood.

This fall, the maps and charts on CrimeStat will be made more interactive so that citizens will be able to customize their searches for crime activity in their neighbourhoods, not just by police districts.

One area may experience a drop in auto theft after a serious offender is apprehended, but another may be experiencing a crime trend that CrimeStat does not yet identify like arson, gun crime, stabbings, or aggravated assault.

Residents should know if a string of garage fires are set in their neighbourhood, or if a violent knife attack occurred around the corner, or if shots were fired just a few streets away.

These are a few of the crimes we will be looking at adding to the CrimeStat model, beginning later this year. This not only increases available information to citizens, but provides police an even better tool to measure their efforts. It helps us link resources to needs and provides more information to assist crime prevention and investigations.

Bear in mind CrimeStat is not simply a fancy website, nor is it a silver bullet.

It is a proactive approach to crime fighting that has been effective in reducing crime in cities across North America.

Mahatma Gandhi once said "All crime is a kind of disease and should be treated as such."

In my opinion, CrimeStat is just the first treatment.

At last year's State of the City, I announced plans for the creation of a Police Advisory Board which would make recommendations to Council on the police service's effectiveness.

At this time, I would like to introduce the members of the Police Advisory Board: Gerald Forrest (Chair), Sam Anderson, Sel Burrows, Nahanni Fontaine, Robert Gabor, Reverend Larry Grogan, Bob Holliday, David Keam, Melanie Lautt, Aiden O'Brien, and Charles Rubin.

I look forward to their positive input as we strive to improve the efficiency of the Winnipeg Police Service.

Winnipeg's first ever permanent Street Crime Unit, dedicated solely to finding and arresting criminals anywhere in our city, had a very successful and productive year.

In 2007, the Street Crime Unit: made 1,153 arrests, seized nearly \$2 million dollars in cash, drugs and property, seized 38 illegal firearms, seized 36 vehicles used in the conveyance of illegal drugs, and executed 67 search warrants.

No one will soundly argue that fighting serious crime isn't a vital component in making our community a safer place.

But nuisance offences and neighbourhood disorder cannot be overlooked.

Nobody can turn a blind eye to the pestilence of graffiti or the concern of aggressive panhandling, and wonder why crime escalates.

The city increased funding for graffiti removal by a half a million dollars in 2007.

But we needed to take stronger measures to ensure the blight doesn't spread in the first place.

This past November council approved an aggressive graffiti control bylaw to stop the sale and possession of spray paint to minors.

This is just one tool to ensure that our neighbourhoods are safe and vibrant communities.

Our bylaw enforcement officers play a key role in ensuring that nuisance offences and neighbourhood liveability standards are strictly enforced.

Since 2004, under the Vacant and Derelict Building bylaw, the City's Planning, Property and Development Department have issued 696 orders and laid 33 charges, the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service have issued 788 orders and 117 common offence notices, and 574 derelict buildings have been demolished.

The Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service has temporarily assigned three more fire prevention officers to enforce safety standards for vacant buildings, to ensure compliance with the Vacant and Derelict Buildings Bylaw, and to address a backlog of approximately 450 properties on the City's Vacant Building Registry that currently require inspection.

I commend the public service for beginning the process of taking title without compensation to 11 properties where the owners have been convicted under the Vacant and Derelict Buildings Bylaw and have failed to bring their property into compliance.

We are sending a strong message to wanton property owners that this will not be tolerated.

Currently, bylaw enforcement officers are spread through various departments and trained to specialize only in the enforcement of one or two bylaws each.

If a property has a complaint about derelict vehicles and a concern about boulevard maintenance, two different officers from two different departments have to travel to the location to investigate, file resulting paperwork, and contribute to a swollen bureaucracy.

That is why council adopted the implementation of a consolidated bylaw enforcement unit which combines officers from a number of departments and streamlines a variety of bylaws into one single entity – the neighbourhood liveability bylaw.

Once the unit is fully operational, I will be asking the Public Service to look at other bylaws that could be included in their mandate – for example, aggressive panhandling.

If our bylaw enforcement unit can assist first responders, we will be using our resources more efficiently to ensure that everyone feels safe in our city.

Through the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement, we have supported the Downtown Biz Outreach Patrol. Biz patrol members have received special constable status from the Province, allowing them to deal with intoxicated persons in the downtown and direct them to appropriate social service agencies.

The Outreach Patrol have been instrumental in allowing the police and Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service to focus on higher priority issues.

Our Downtown and Exchange District are two of our city's biggest assets, but perceptions of the area have been negatively influenced due to aggressive panhandling and public intoxication that occurs on a daily basis.

As my good friend, Councillor Lazarenko would say, they wouldn't tolerate that in Tuxedo.

Well guess what, I agree Harry. No Winnipegger should tolerate crime in any area.

Will Rogers once suggested that "we don't seem to be able to stop crime, so why not legalize it, then tax it out of business."

That might seem logical to some politicians, but not yours truly.

I will be working with our enforcement agencies to take a zero tolerance approach in the enforcement of offences like aggressive panhandling and public intoxication so everyone knows we are serious about our city.

Community input, communication, and collaboration is imperative to our success.

We can't expect to be effective in creating safer neighbourhoods, if the Winnipeg Police Service operates inside a vacuum.

I am encouraged that Chief McCaskill has made it a priority to meet with community groups from around the city to gain their valuable input.

One community partnership that has shown solid results is the relationship between the police and the Point Douglas Residents Committee.

Sel Burrows and his committee have worked tirelessly on behalf of their neighbourhood to draw attention to the issues facing their community.

One goal the residents committee set was to make Point Douglas a crack-free zone. By working with the police and the Province of Manitoba's Safer Neighbourhoods Unit, residents claimed that their goal was close to being accomplished as of early December.

Unfortunately the issues facing this community are not unique.

By taking ownership of a community, you take ownership of your future. And I applaud the hard-working residents of Point Douglas for taking measures to secure a vibrant future for themselves and their children.

Bruce Owen recently wrote in the Winnipeg Free Press about the positive steps already taken, and our need to get more feet on the street.

According to a free press poll, 91% of us believe we need more police out on the streets.

I am pleased to work with St. Vital Councillor Gord Steeves as we explore new ways to insure that police are doing what they want to do – fighting crime and arresting criminals.

Do police officers really need to attend to minor fender benders? Do they need to be directing traffic at intersections when lights go out? These are questions we are asking to align the priorities of the Service with the priorities of the people.

I am pleased to work with St. James Brooklands Councillor Scott Fielding to explore the use of close-circuit television cameras in the downtown area.

Crime cameras are being used successfully worldwide including many Canadian jurisdictions. It is up to the City and its downtown partners to explore all options at our disposal to let criminals know they are not welcome.

Tom Brodbeck said last week, “if installing surveillance cameras in high-crime areas help bust muggers, armed punks and all the other scumbags who make our streets unsafe, I say bring it on.... Cams in high-crime areas? A no-brainer...” I agree, Tom.

Thanks to an image captured from a local business’ surveillance camera in December, the police apprehended a suspect in the case of a sexually assaulted 11 year old girl.

Surveillance discourages criminals who want to endanger our citizens.

Several options exist for this initiative including a network monitored by the police, and a “virtual network” linking other agencies that have security cameras with the Winnipeg Police Service to ensure real-time access to their monitoring.

But fighting crime shouldn’t focus solely on what happens once a crime has occurred. So we will continue to work with the Chief to investigate stronger measures of crime prevention.

The Winnipeg Sun recently reported that “about two-thirds of inmates released from Manitoba’s provincial jails since 2001 were charged with another crime within two years of their release.”

We all know about the revolving door, and the frustrations of the hard working men and women of the Winnipeg Police Service who deal daily with the same criminals.

It seems like every day you hear about the exploits of 13 to 17 year old car thieves. The Winnipeg Auto Theft Suppression Strategy call these punks level 4 offenders, the worst offenders who continually endanger the lives of our citizens.

These same thieves are stealing cars to attend social programming aimed at curbing auto-theft.

There must be meaningful consequences for their actions.

According to the Stolen Auto Unit, auto theft went down by 27% this year. However attempted auto theft went up by 8.8%.

In 2007, Council provided funds for a mobile electronic license-plate reader and related equipment to scan traffic and identify stolen cars.

The Province of Manitoba provided funding for an additional 5 positions in the Stolen Auto Unit effectively doubling the unit’s presence, and now operating 7 days a week.

It takes everyone working together to address these issues – parents, caregivers, police officers, community leaders, and all levels of government.

It’s like the joke, how many councillors does it take to change a light bulb?

Three. One to do the work, and two to complain it should be the Province’s responsibility.

In the coming months, Council will be presented with an integrated crime prevention strategy for consideration, which will engage all levels of government, communities, social agencies, First Nations and faith-based groups.

The goal of this effort will be to prevent our youth from turning to a criminal lifestyle and providing them with positive alternatives.

We’ve all heard talk in the past about a ‘new deal’.

It is time for a new deal; a new deal on crime.

Positive alternatives are a part of the solution, but there needs to be meaningful consequences.

I think we can agree the police are doing their job and arresting criminals, but all levels of government must play their part and not perpetuate a catch and release program.

This past September, I went to Ottawa along with Premier Doer, Minister Chomiak, Mayor Burgess of Brandon, opposition leaders Hugh McFadyen and Jon Gerrard, and citizens who passionately believe we need to make changes in the way we deal with criminals.

Our delegation met with MPs to request Criminal Code and Youth Criminal Justice Act amendments.

Number 1, eliminate the two for one remand credit, which gives prisoners double or higher credit for the time they have spent in remand facilities;

Two, make auto theft an indictable violent offence under the YCJA, because we need to convince a judge to deny bail and impose sentences upon these young auto thieves.

Number 3, strengthen penalties under the YCJA for serious crimes including auto theft.

Four, first degree murder charges for gang-related homicides.

And 5, make shooting a weapon at a building, or drive-by shootings an indictable offence under the Criminal Code.

I am encouraged by the support we received from all three federal political parties. But we need action now.

As we leave today and return to work, and home to our families, I want to remind you that our priorities are clear.

We set the wheels in motion for economic development by cutting red tape that binds city hall, we've invested strongly in our neglected crumbling infrastructure. We are engaging environmental issues and linking positively with the Aboriginal community.

Yes, the city is concerned about money, and concerned that it is spent wisely

and efficiently on your priorities.

By taking decisive action today, we are building a positive future.

We've all chosen to be a part of this city of opportunity, but we choose to enjoy and experience it safely.

With council's focus on investing effectively in our police resources, our new Police Chief's enthusiasm, and our partnerships with the other levels of government, we can continue to make Winnipeg the place our young people will want to work, play, and invest.

Thank you all very much.