

Mayor's Annual Address to the City

February 8, 2010

It's an honour and a privilege to present my 2010 address to the citizens of New Westminster.

As the Mayor of this great city, I believe I have the best job in the world. Working with Council, staff and citizens of The Royal City has been a dream come true for me and seeing the progress we have made together over the years makes all the hard work worthwhile.

2009 was quite a year, wasn't it? We celebrated our city's 150th anniversary with pomp and ceremony the whole year through. But while 2009 was about fun and celebration, it was also about hard work and planning, and setting in motion projects that will change the face of New Westminster for our citizens now, and for those who will call this place home in the future.

As I always do, on behalf of City Council, I'd like to thank the citizens of New Westminster for the opportunity to work for you, and with you, over the course of the past year. Your Council has worked well together, tackling some unique challenges while moving our city forward. We have a great team on this Council and Councillor Cote, Councillor Harper, Councillor McEvoy, Councillor McIntosh, Councillor Osterman and Councillor Williams, I'd like to express my sincere appreciation to each of you for all of your tireless work on behalf of our citizens over the past year.

I'd also like to recognize the efforts of city staff. I'd be remiss in not pointing out that the City of New Westminster has the best and hardest working staff of any municipality. I am constantly reminded by residents that I speak with about the high quality of service people receive from city staff. Our annual surveys provide solid proof that Royal City residents are pleased with the quality of service they receive from City Hall. I've lived in a few cities over the course of my life and I can tell you that the level of citizen satisfaction we have here in New Westminster is no small feat. On behalf of Council and all residents, I want to thank city staff for their expertise, dedication and hard work throughout 2009.

And of course, a big thank you to the citizens of New Westminster. Our 150th celebrations would not have been successful without the eager participation of the people who call The Royal City home. Likewise, all of the progress we made throughout the year could not have happened either. I firmly believe we live in the best city, with the best citizens of any city in Canada. By continuing to work together, we will build New Westminster for the future.

Our theme for our 150th celebrations in 2009 was “Celebrating Our Past, Embracing the Future”. While the many events and festivities certainly did a great job of celebrating our rich past, there were many initiatives underway that embraced the future for New Westminister and will leave a lasting legacy in our city.

We secured generous funding from senior levels of government that is enabling us to make improvements in New Westminister including sidewalk and street revitalization and construction of a new Youth Centre at Moody Park.

Of course, the big news in 2009 was the funding announcement for a new Westminister Pier Park along our historic waterfront. New Westminister received the second highest amount of infrastructure funding of any city in British Columbia – over \$16 million dollars – to complete the first phase of remediating half a kilometre of former industrial land on our waterfront. Thanks to this funding from the federal and provincial governments, our new Westminister Pier Park is destined to become the latest jewel in The Royal City’s crown. When the first phase is completed next year, this park will become an integral part of the Fraser River Experience – a partnership between the Province of British Columbia and municipalities that will see a riverside trail system linking Hope to the Pacific Ocean. It’s an important legacy for the future and one that we are very happy to be a part of.

Last summer, hundreds of people attended the ribbon-cutting to open our new Moody Park Outdoor Pool. If the steady attendance at this new facility is any indication, this project was the right decision for our city and for the families who live here.

Also in 2009, we began the process of securing a site on Columbia Street for our new 80,000 square foot multi-use civic facility. Fully paid for from casino funds, the new \$35 million dollar facility will occupy a place of prominence at the gateway to our historic downtown district, providing services and places to gather for residents and visitors alike.

Our new Downtown Community Plan is complete. Informed by a thorough public consultation process, the plan will help shape the future of New Westminister’s downtown core. For decades, the question of how to revitalize Columbia Street and the downtown district has been a challenging one. With this new plan, I firmly believe that we have the answer. I’m so confident, that I’m comfortable making the following prediction: in a decade’s time, Columbia Street will have returned to its former prominence as the “place to be”, a destination for people throughout the Lower Mainland to come for shopping and entertainment as well as an attractive choice for our own citizens.

Also in our downtown, the City worked with the school district to purchase the former St. Mary's Hospital site that will become the location of a new school and park space in the future. As well, City Council and staff continue to work with the school district to resolve issues around the siting of a new high school for our younger citizens. In 2010, we'll continue working with all parties to ensure that construction can begin on the new high school as soon as possible.

The development world has finally discovered what we've known all along – New Westminister is a great place to live, work and play. In 2010, we'll see the completion of the Plaza 88 development above the New Westminister SkyTrain station. This innovative project has already caught the attention of media across North America for its integration with SkyTrain. Two weeks ago, I was pleased to speak at a press conference held to announce the newest Plaza 88 tenant – Landmark Cinemas – that will bring a 10 screen movie theatre to New Westminister. No longer will residents and visitors have to travel to Coquitlam, Burnaby or Vancouver to see a movie. With this new theatre complex, along with all of the great shops, restaurants and entertainment we already have in the Royal City, and of course, our newly revitalized Hyack Square, our citizens have options for a great evening out, right here close to home.

But it's not just the downtown core that is experiencing a revival – everywhere you go in New Westminister, you can see a positive future. Improvements to sidewalks, streets and lighting in our 12th Street business district are nearly complete, shining a bright light on a vibrant street and the many great businesses located there. If you haven't had the opportunity, be sure to venture down to 12th Street to see the improvements, including the unique sidewalk mosaic art that captures the lively feel of this area.

Street and sidewalk improvements in Sapperton are underway and soon, construction will begin on an innovative mixed commercial, retail and residential area located on the old Labatt's site. The Brewery District is destined to put historic Sapperton on the map once again and will have a positive impact on the oldest neighbourhood in our city.

Over in Queensborough, new parks are being developed, thanks again to casino funding. And improvements at Queensborough Community Centre – the hub of this wonderful part of the city – have been met with great fanfare by residents there.

While there are a number of projects either planned or underway throughout the city, we haven't ignored our responsibilities on the social front. Working with the many agencies, non-profits and organizations that work to make life better for all of us, a number of initiatives were launched in 2009 that are underway in 2010:

- Last month, I was proud to attend the opening of the new Russell Housing Centre with 55 units and am looking forward to the opening of the Maria

Keary and Garfield Housing projects with a combined 44 units of housing. These projects will provide quality, stable housing with supports, resulting in less street and visible homelessness in our city.

- Working in partnership with immigrant support agencies, the City of New Westminster has accessed over \$365,000 dollars, with another \$50,000 on the way, from Welcome BC, supporting the creation of more welcoming and inclusive communities. Funded projects include a Community Gateway Project, which will recruit welcome ambassadors, a Newcomers' guide, and Immigrant Mentorship Project, and a Newcomer Youth Popular Theatre Project.
- We've also completed a Child Care Needs Assessment and Strategy and are moving forward with recommendations including a Civic Child Care Grant Program, permissive zoning regulations and a Step-by-Step guide. Over the past year alone, more than 150 new licensed child care spaces have been created in New Westminster.
- And, of course, the Wheelability Assessment Project, which will enhance active transportation options for people who are reliant on wheelchairs, scooters, walkers and other mobility aids. This project involved over 200 mobility aid users in its development and implementation and it has received national recognition for its innovation.

In the area of economic development, we've worked with the development community and new businesses to shine a spotlight on all that New Westminster offers. Our trip to Japan, Korea and China earlier in the fall solidified important relationships and explored new opportunities for our city. In the coming months and years, we anticipate the strong ties that we have established with our sister and friendship cities will see economic and cultural benefits that will be shared by all of our citizens.

The City of New Westminster has remained "committed to service" throughout our history. City departments and our top-notch staff are constantly striving to find ways to better deliver the high-quality services that our residents both demand and deserve. A number of initiatives have been completed on that front and we're proud of each and every one of them.

Over the past year we've launched a new public website featuring more content and easy navigation for people using the worldwide web to access information about New Westminster. Our Parks, Culture and Recreation department launched a new online registration system for their many programs as well as a new Active Living Guide format at the same time. New entry signage is currently being installed throughout the city that



captures the heritage and beauty of New Westminster.. And, to help keep our children safe, speed reader boards were erected in high traffic zones around elementary schools in the City.

In 2010, we'll launch a new Wi-Fi project in Queen's Park and Uptown, testing wireless network technology that ultimately, will connect residents and visitors to the internet no matter where they are in the City.

Yes, the future certainly does belong to New Westminster.

In the coming year, City Council will continue to provide the leadership to steer our city forward and city staff will continue their excellent work on behalf of our citizens.

We'll work with organizations and with our many local volunteers who give countless hours of their time to make New Westminster a truly livable community.

And, as always, we'll continue to work for you – the residents of The Royal City – to create a great place to live work and play.

In closing, I'd like to again thank Council and staff for rising to the many challenges of the past year and laying the foundation for what is shaping up to be an exciting 2010 for The Royal City.

I'd also like to express my deep gratitude to the volunteers and civic leaders that work so hard to make ours a great community.

And, of course, a tremendous thank you to our citizens. Your passion for your community captures the real spirit of this city, a special place with a unique charm and character. Where neighbours are friends and a feeling of belonging means that, no matter where you go, you can always call New Westminster home.

Thank you.