

Mayor Rob Keffer's Speech

Status of the Economy Breakfast – April 21, 2016

Thank you very much for inviting me here today. In fact, I have a few thanks to give out before I get started.

Thank you to Deputy Mayor Leduc, and members of Council for being here this morning.

Thank you to the members of our business community for attending today. Thank you for starting your day early. I'm glad that you were able to make this a priority and that you are making the extra effort to inform yourselves about our local economy.

Thank you to the members of the media who are helping spread this information to those who couldn't make it here for 7am.

Thank you to Laura Cooper from the Royal Bank of Canada. We value RBC as a member of our business community and we are very pleased to have you here to share your expertise with us.

And finally, thank you to the Bradford Board of Trade for continuing to provide opportunities like this for businesspeople to learn and share ideas, to help ensure BWG remains a great place to do businesses.

I'm pleased to say that I think BWG *IS* a great place to do business, and it just keeps getting better.

The last time I spoke at a Bradford Board of Trade breakfast, I gave you a status update on the three key principles that I first introduced when I was inaugurated as Mayor. The three principles that I have made my guideposts for success are:

- First, Town Council will be collaborative, consultative, respectful and transparent.
- Second, we will operate with the highest respect for your tax dollars.
- And third, Council and staff will work hard on your behalf, enacting an ambitious agenda to build a better town.

Today I want to revisit these principles from the perspective of our economy.

First: being Collaborative, Consultative, Respectful and Transparent

All members of Council are working as a team. You may contact any one of us to talk about your projects or issues.

Council is continuing with our Community Access Network meetings where residents can come and bring issues forward in an informal setting.

Speaking on behalf of all of Council, we are great believers in the value of community participation through advisory committees.

The Downtown Revitalization Committee has been an important source of local knowledge and expertise, and this group continues to help the Town address the specialized needs of our downtown and come up with ideas to encourage patronage of the businesses there.

Downtown Revitalization is moving forward in big ways and small. The Committee has done great work improving the curb appeal with new banners, floral arrangements and other decorations along the main street, and they plan to continue this all year long.

The committee is also consulting with staff and Council regarding the major changes that will affect downtown, from construction of the new South East Arterial Road, to the updated Official Plan, to the reconstruction of Holland Street.

If you have an interest in what's going on at these committee meetings, they are always open to the public, and agendas and minutes are available through our website. Transparency and collaboration is of utmost importance, and we welcome your feedback on the work being done by our committees.

This winter we established a new advisory committee.

The Economic Development Advisory Group was established to provide a forum for residents with business expertise to get involved in local economic development discussions.

The group has had two meetings now, and already I am impressed by the vision its members bring.

These representatives of the local business community will help us prioritize the implementation of the economic development strategic plan, and lend their wisdom on activities to attract new investment, and to retain and expand local investment.

We are looking to bring even more marketing and business development expertise into our Office of Economic Development, and are very excited about the possibilities for this new role.

The second principle is: Respect for Your Tax Dollars

The Housing Market is continuing to flourish, with the average MPAC House Assessment at \$520,000, a 9.1% increase, or \$139,000 increase in 4 years. Our job as Council is to keep tax increases as low as possible. The increase value in your home does not help your disposable income, or your ability to pay more taxes.

I believe an important part of respecting taxpayers is giving you the service you pay for in the most efficient way possible.

You will hear more about this shortly from some of our staff, but in a nutshell, we have restructured our services both organizationally and physically to make sure that the departments you work with most closely are better aligned and easier to access.

Over the next several years, a lot of money is going to be spent on infrastructure, including roads, watermains, forcemains, pumping stations and water towers. We are working hard to ensure we contract with the right people to get the most value we possibly can for our investments.

We also want to step up the conversation with business owners to ensure minimal inconvenience and steady dialogue during times of construction.

Staff in our Engineering, Communications and Economic Development offices are working together to plan how to keep you informed of what's going on, and we will continue to look for new ways to engage with you and keep your needs in mind during construction.

And finally, the third principle is: An Ambitious Agenda to Build a Better Town

We are excited to see many positive changes in our town, and I believe the hard work of organizations like the BBT and the Office of Economic Development have played an important part in these changes.

We are thrilled that the building that long stood empty at #4 Holland Street West has been filled and given a facelift, helping to bring new polish to our downtown core.

We are very pleased to be receiving interest in the former Faurecia plant, and hope that very soon we will have a new tenant and bring more jobs to our community.

And above all, we are proud to be encouraging revitalization in both our downtown and industrial areas through new and improved Community Improvement Plans.

The Downtown CIP has been revised, and we have reset the clock on this five-year program so that it will now run until the year 2020.

- We have lowered the minimum funding amount so that smaller scale projects are now eligible, and raised the maximum to allow for larger scale development.

- We have expanded the boundaries of the eligible area.
- And we have simplified the design guidelines to make it easier for applicants to navigate the process.

We have revised the CIP for Industrial Areas as well, likewise resetting the period of the program to run from 2016 to 2020.

We have increased the tax-based Redevelopment Grant Program amount from 75% to 100%.

- A new provision will help promote the expansion of existing industrial buildings.
- We have expanded the boundaries of the eligible area.
- And we have included a forgivable loan program of up to \$50,000.

These changes are designed to ensure that the funds earmarked for business investment are taken advantage of, and in combination with our more aggressive marketing plans, we expect to see a lot more applications to these programs.

We are also investigating other opportunities to use incentive programs to encourage specific types of development that we believe are necessary in BWG.

This week we held the first public meeting to consider a CIP for seniors housing.

We are also looking at possible incentives to encourage investment in a hotel or conference centre.

Through the use of CIPs, we minimize financial risk, while being open to investing in businesses that meet the specific needs of our residents and bring opportunity to our community.

In closing, I would like to thank in advance some of our senior staff for being here today to give you greater detail on what the Town is doing to prepare ourselves for growth.

We are open for business here in Bradford West Gwillimbury, and I look forward to taking the next steps with you.

I will see you on Saturday at the Town and Country Living Show!