

Mayor Rob Keffer's Speech

Mayor's Breakfast – November 17, 2016

Good morning everyone, and thank you so much for joining me here for this annual event.

Thanks to the Bradford Board of Trade's leadership, this annual breakfast has become a forum to talk about celebrating our business successes in 2016 and discussing how we are positioning the Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury to be a leader in Simcoe County.

Looking back on my first two years as mayor, I am reminded of what I said on the evening of my inauguration. That night, I outlined three key principles that should guide Town Council.

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

I am pleased to say we are delivering on these three principles.

Town Council is far more positive, productive and collaborative than it was previously. We work hard together as a team. We may not always agree, but we have good discussions at the Council table and we respect where everyone is coming from.

We have hosted forums to engage artists and environmentalists in our Town, and work with BWG Diversity to ensure an inclusive community that celebrates our diversity.

We have an amazing twelve committees where we have local citizens involved in our Town's development. Our committees are hard at work to make a difference in their expert areas, and taking the initiative to make positive change happen.

I've been pleased to see how our Council has taken transparency and accessibility to heart, with a more positive and collaborative tone that respects the voices of the voters.

I am also pleased and proud with the work we have done together as a Council to ensure taxes stay as low as possible while still investing to build a better Town.

Over the past two years, taxes have only gone up by 1.2%. We have kept our promise to keep taxes as low as possible without cutting services.

We've held the line on spending by being smart with where we invest but we are still investing and building a better Town for all parts of Town – more for road rehabilitation, more for sidewalks, more for urban forestry, more for parks.

But today, after two years as mayor, I want to focus on the third principle and speak about that ambitious agenda of building a better town for all parts of Town.

An important priority for our Council is to ensure a diverse mix of housing options.

This weekend, we will have a sod-turning event for the new Elden of Bradford, a 152-unit seniors' assisted living facility to be built by the Presbyterian Church.

There have also been two other public meetings for assisted living seniors housing proposals, one across from the CIBC at Walmart, and one beside Home Depot. Additional proposals for seniors housing are also in the works. The condominium on Barrie Street is now being built and there is a plan to build two low-rise condominiums on Holland Street, west of the TSC plaza.

Our Town needs more affordable housing and Simcoe County recently issued a Call for Proposals for Municipal Contributions for Affordable Rental Housing Development.

The County chose a development in Wasaga Beach as their first priority; however, the second and third choices are both for developments in Bradford, and they will be doing preliminary drawings for an addition to 100 Miller Park. This is very encouraging and over the next few years, we hope to see the County investing funds for affordable housing in our community.

Economic development brings jobs and the planned development for assisted living will provide a variety of employment opportunities for approximately 90 people in the areas of – nursing, dietary, housekeeping and other support services.

Job creation and economic growth is what will make a better town.

I want to thank our Economic Development Committee — one of several committees of local residents working to improve our town — for all their hard work and guidance. We are beginning to see the results of the collaborative effort to grow our local economy, as James has alluded to.

Even as we expand our economic zone to Highway 400, we are continuing to increase our support to our existing three job zones — the two industrial parks - Reagans and Artisan and the downtown core. The Faurecia building is being re-fitted for Med Releaf, a medical marijuana facility, but it was a vacant facility and this will bring high paying, scientific and research jobs to our Town.

You know about our Community Improvement Plans,

Our downtown CIP has been extended and increased in terms of the support it offers

The result is that we are seeing significant improvements in our downtown, as new and existing businesses renovate their storefronts, expand their commercial properties and invest to position themselves for success. I am proud the Town has played a key role to help kick start this progress.

We are seeing a great number of new small businesses opening their doors throughout the downtown and, indeed, throughout town.

We have established an important partnership with Human Endeavour, whose EPIC training centre help both employers and employees in our community.

EPIC will provide training and certification for trades, as well as business placements, soft skills training, computer training, entrepreneurship and community-building.

It will also work with existing and prospective employers by developing customized training solutions to fulfill their labour requirements.

I have always said that I am focused on smart growth, that I want to build a better Town, not just a bigger Town. We held a record number of flag raisings this year, and we are seeing more and more cultural communities working together to celebrate their heritage.

The Town held several inaugural events this year, including Music in the Park and Shakespeare in the Park, as well as partnering with other community groups on new initiatives such as the York-Simcoe Youth Music Festival.

And yet, we can't have a better Town unless we concentrate on our Transportation system.

We are very proud of our local transit system. BWG Transit has been in service for two and a half years, with approximately 19,000 rides taken last year. Significant changes have been made to routes and schedules in order to serve more residents, including high school students, seniors and young families.

We are working as aggressively as possible to ensure we stop traffic congestion in Town and still keep our roads safe for our community.

The biggest item on our transportation agenda this year has been the Highway 400-404 Connecting Link.

I feel very strongly that the Link is critical to help alleviate traffic congestion caused by vehicles using Holland Street to get to Highway 400.

I have worked aggressively with local mayors, Simcoe County and York Region to pressure the province to build the Link. We have met with the Minister of Transportation on several occasions. We have launched an unprecedented public relations campaign to encourage our residents to advocate for the Link, too. We need the Link to improve transportation across our region, to support our environmental goals and to unlock much-needed employment lands. I will continue to advocate for it.

I also continue to encourage the province to ensure it follows through on plans for all-day, frequent GO train service. It will be a game-changer for traffic and our daily lives when we can hop on a train at any hour of the day and get to and from Toronto with convenience. Imagine being able to take the GO train to an appointment in Newmarket at Southlake, or taking the kids up to Kempenfelt Bay in Barrie by train. GO train expansion will make such a big difference in our traffic issues and quality of life, and I am excited to see it and will keep advocating for it to be delivered sooner rather than later.

Within our Town, we are also vigorously working on road rehabilitation in the Bradford Urban Area, as well as rural roads. We have to look after the urban forest, and sidewalks and parks.

To make our Town a better Town, we have to effectively engage residents and businesses in the Town's activities, plans and priorities.

I certainly hope that everyone has seen an increase in opportunities and methods to communicate with council.

From events like this one today, to Community Access Meetings, to social media, to emails or simply picking up the phone, my fellow council members and I have made ourselves available to residents and business owners in many ways.

Some of you here today will remember the excitement of 1967 - Canada's Centennial and Expo '67.

2017 is our Nation's 150th birthday and our Town is looking at a year of special events.

Planned activities include a Mayor's Levee, Special Doors Open in June, Accessibility Awareness Day in May, Canada Day Parade and a special Carrot Fest.

Every home will receive a Canada Flag.

Our ears are open to any ideas and there will be a form on the Town's website for you to fill out.

Let's make Canada's 150th birthday a year to remember.

As you know, I'm a farmer and businessman. That means a number of things about my personality and my approach. It means I'm frugal. It means I am patient. It means I work hard. My farming background has defined my work over the past two years — we did the hard work necessary to get our fiscal house in order, to act frugally and with respect for taxpayers. We planted the seeds through investments in infrastructure to unlock our jobs corridor. We have watered those seeds through marketing and working to attract development to Town, including through our CIP incentive programmes.

Now, like any farmer, I am excited to see the bountiful harvest.

I know the Board of Trade is too.

Thank everyone here for all your hard work and expertise.

Thank you for hosting this breakfast.

Together, we will build a better town, for all parts of town.

I hope you're as excited as I am for what comes next.