

## **State of the City Address - January 2010**

**By Mayor Dan Rogers**

Thank you for the opportunity to address you this evening, to reflect on the past year and to note the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

We're entering a new decade and with it brings a feeling of optimism and excitement. This is an Olympic year and we need only to look into the eyes of those who will proudly represent us in Vancouver to understand what can be achieved with a strong vision, a positive attitude, and an unbending determination to do what is necessary - to reach beyond what was first thought to be unattainable.

Our community is stronger for the people who have brought us to where we are and I certainly want to begin this evening by acknowledging my colleagues on Council, for you have all worked extremely hard over the past year to provide the leadership that this community needs. This leadership has occurred in the face of tough times, and changing circumstances.

We have seen building permit values drop by near 45% from the year previous. Planning services revenue has dropped by near 45%. Unemployment is as high as it has been in the past decade at just over 12%. On the plus side, business licenses are up near 13% from the year previous. While we have weathered the storm of adversity and we have seen some recent upward trends, unfortunately we are lagging behind the rest of the province and this reality will test us all in the months to come. But as we look to those challenges, we should pause and reflect on the achievements of the past year.

Let me begin first by acknowledging some of the people who have come and some of those who have gone.

We were pleased to bring on Brenda Butterworth-Carr as our new top cop – our new RCMP Superintendent. This outstanding officer understands that safety is not just about law enforcement, it's about building relationships that lay the foundation for a safer community, a community that cares.

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Beyond our own operations, Prince George welcomed with open arms UNBC's newest President Dr. George Iwama. Sadly the community also said a final farewell to far too many including former Mayor Harold Moffat.

In the course of Council's work, we took time to recognize many of our leaders including two local RCMP members who were decorated for their bravery in the line of duty. On the cultural side, we recognized dancer Izaak Smith who reached the national stage and with athletics we also acknowledged the CHL's rookie of the year in our own Brett Connelly and paid tribute to boxing icon Harold Mann.

Among the recognition of success was one that centered on the team here at the City who together achieved the National Quality Institute's "Gold Level" status. The City has been on this quality journey for more than seven years and now stands together with some of the leading organizations in the country. The City was also recognized by the Community Energy Association for its innovation in striving to reduce community energy consumption, most notably through initiatives such as the "Free Fare for Clean Air" Transit Program, an innovative program that is unmatched across the country.

Aside from the regular business around this table, Council was extremely busy in the community throughout the year...

...We promoted and participated in our annual spring cleanup  
...We launched our first ever Bike to Work Week  
...Took part in National Clean Air Day  
...And we even survived a Dodge Ball challenge against the dedicated staff at Aimhi.

It is also important for us to recognize the many people in our community that volunteer. We are Canada's Volunteer Capital as much as we are BC's Northern Capital and that was evident again during events such as:

- The Canadian Men's Collegiate Basketball Championship at UNBC
- The World Baseball Challenge
- The Road to the Roar Curling Event

That community spirit will be evident later this month as UNBC hosts the JDC West Business Competition – it will be evident during the annual Coldsnap Music Festival, and it will be evident when the Olympic Torch passes through our city on January 29<sup>th</sup>. We will see it later this year when we play host to the Minerals North Conference, and when we welcome delegates to the Trans Canada Yellowhead Highway Association AGM.

When we as Council reflect on our achievements in 2009, I suspect near the top will be our successful efforts in pushing hard for funding for Boundary Road. This \$28 million dollar project, set to be completed by the end of 2011, comes as a result of an investment by all levels of government in partnership with the private sector.

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This road will link Highway 97 to Highway 16 atop Airport Hill and will form the infrastructure backbone that will give rise to greater business development and prosperity.

The effort to seek out every possible source of funding for our priorities also resulted in us securing federal funds for much needed arena upgrades and most recently for upgrades to our aquatic facilities.

In addition, despite the significant global economic downturn, and the challenges this new Council tackled very early in its mandate, we were able to produce a budget that saw more money – some \$3.2 million – spent on Road Rehabilitation – more than has ever been spent for this purpose in this City’s history.

Council further added another half million to our snow budget, taking it to \$5 million, unfortunately as we have seen in 2009 – even \$5 million a year may not be enough. This is a discussion that will be front and centre for Council in the weeks to come.

I also want to acknowledge the many people who volunteered their time, passion, and input during our Smart Growth on the Ground Project for downtown. Close to 40 participated in the design charette and many more were engaged in the broader work to create a “shared vision” for downtown, a major accomplishment in 2009. This concept is uniquely defined by its desire to reconnect the city centre with the two rivers that flow through our community.

The most recent announcement by Terasen Gas that it will be bringing a hundred new jobs to the downtown was further great news. That announcement also included their intent to purchase a building that was previously in public hands which is further, and perhaps an even stronger statement about their faith in the future of Prince George and our city centre.

And a reflection on 2009 wouldn’t be complete without noting the plane. The Southern Air 747 to be precise. This flight will forever be the marker in time that tangibly displayed the potential that lies ahead for Prince George as we establish ourselves as a key player in the business of international logistics, moving products to markets.

And while it is nice to reflect on the past, only by envisioning the future and living in the present can positive change occur. So we now focus on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

A year ago I spoke of the need to be reflective but forward thinking, of the need to be passionate but respectful, of the need to be patient but determined. Those qualities are as essential today as they were a year ago.

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A year ago we started to digest the costs associated with replacing the current RCMP building. This is an issue that has confronted Council for almost a decade as we, and those who have come before us, have explored every option to meet the needs of our police force. Continued review of cost saving initiatives is being explored by administration with the assistance of several members of Council. The results of those efforts will be back before us in the coming weeks and I am confident the members of Council involved in this process will bring us back something that helps us meet our needs while identifying every opportunity to save money.

A year ago, I stated that Council would be challenged to keep one eye on the present while also focusing on the long term....Over the past year, while continuing to guide the ship through stormy economic waters, Council has come together and established clear priorities, priorities that have been articulated in our strategic plan. Council has also further defined its vision for the future.

This vision centres on creating a resilient and sustainable city that is the cleanest, safest, and healthiest city in the country by 2035. It has been developed as a touchstone for the community. A beginning point that will be further shaped in 2010 by the many that are providing their thoughts and aspirations for the future of the city through myPG, our long term sustainability plan. When completed later this year, that shared vision for the future will be entrenched in our updated Official Community Plan.

A year ago I spoke of the need to develop a dialogue of cooperation with the two senior levels of government – to forge new partnerships...A concerted effort in this regard has seen positive results. And our efforts to secure further infrastructure stimulus money will not stop. We remain committed to ensuring the provincial and federal governments understand how we need their help in mitigating the potential of flooding, we need their commitment to help improve downtown and we need to be partners in improving the quality of life for the entire community. This partnership approach will also be extended to our First Nation neighbours as we look to strengthen our relationship with the Lheidli T'enneh.

A year ago I spoke of the need to focus on three specific areas: our environment, our economy and the community's social needs, the three pillars of sustainability.

On the economic front, Prince George will not only play a role but has a responsibility to be at the forefront in creating new jobs and a sense of optimism that will be felt throughout the entire region. The City, through its economic development agency, Initiatives Prince George, will ensure our economy remains resilient through these challenging times, whether that's fostering the development of our bio-energy potential or using the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games as an opportunity to promote our City, our people, and our products to the world.

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Beyond the Vancouver games lies our own opportunity as the city continues to prepare a winning bid to host the Canada Winter Games. We believe 2015 should be the north's time to shine and the Canada Winter Games would not only bring millions of dollars into this community, it would put Prince George on the national stage and would inspire many across the north to set higher goals, leaving lasting legacies in this city and the region.

Among Council's priorities is continuing to foster the revitalization of our downtown. In 2009 we saw some positive steps forward with an increased focus by our police force in the downtown, the creation of the downtown community garden, with increased attention to the physical appearance of the downtown through more line painting, increased maintenance to civic properties and even more street lighting for the holiday season. We will make even greater strides in 2010 as we look to implement more of the recommendations of the downtown task force and seek out more partnerships that will result in both public and private sector investment in the downtown.

In terms of our Environment...Council, to its credit has identified taking better care of our air, water, and land resources as a priority. The proposed District Energy System holds a great deal of potential but we must, and we will, quantify and communicate those benefits to the community. There is no doubt that we will be challenged to move forward on the environment front but we cannot shy away from the need for Council to take a leadership role in establishing clear policy objectives.

In the coming weeks, I will be seeking Council's input into ways we can more rapidly implement environmental improvements whether that's with respect to policy issues around air quality or in the way we operate as a corporation, ensuring we lead by example in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reducing waste while conserving both energy and water.

We have identified increasing Civic Pride as a priority and here too I will be engaging Council to explore ways we can work with the community so that our annual spring cleanup is not just a once-a-year effort but instead just one example of an on-going effort to be clean to the core.

On the social side, a year ago I spoke of the need to create a "Safer Streets Initiative". I want to thank those on our Downtown Task Force along with the Beyond Homelessness Committee for their collaborative approach to developing the "Clean & Safe" program and to the RCMP that have developed the Downtown Enforcement Unit, both initiatives that will be further detailed during the upcoming budget discussions.

Our Social Development will also focus on increased housing options for those with the greatest need, whether it is those with special needs or seniors on fixed incomes. Here too we will seek out partnerships with both BC Housing and local service providers who have a strong track record of success in providing non-market housing in the city.

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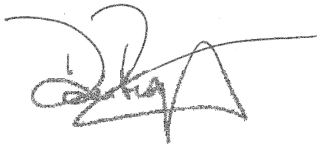
A year ago, I challenged us all to seek out new ways to increase our citizens' involvement in finding solutions to the many challenges before us. myPG is laying the foundation for continual grassroots involvement. These efforts will assist greatly in achieving Council's priority of building stronger neighbourhoods. To dovetail on this effort and to help move this priority ahead, I will discuss with Council the ways we can shift even greater decision making to the neighbourhood level, an approach that is occurring in many progressive cities across North America like Seattle and Edmonton.

In closing, I want to provide a final thought. As has been said by others and now repeated here - How we get to where we need to be hinges in great measure on a shift from saying *it's up to them* - to instead saying *it's up to me*....a shift in attitude and action. Everyone in the community is in a position of influence and as has been shown in the past, when we work together we can accomplish great things.

I have no doubt that this Council with its can-do attitude will make great strides over the next year in achieving the goals it has established for itself. And indeed, when understanding the significant hardships and conflicts being experienced by others around the world, there is much for us to be appreciative of and to be optimistic about.

Sincerely,

**CITY OF PRINCE GEORGE**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Rogers', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Dan Rogers,  
Mayor