

2016 State of the City Speech
Wednesday, April 13, 2016
41 Ardelt Place, Kitchener

Check Against Delivery

Thank you Mandy, for that kind introduction.

Mandy is just one example of the fighting spirit which for generations, has seen people come to our community to pursue their dreams. It is a real honour for me today to have her take a break from her training on her Road to Rio to share her Make it Kitchener story.

We'll all be cheering you on in July, Mandy!

And thank you Rod for inspiring all of us with **Make It Kitchener** – a bold, exciting new approach to economic development for the City of Kitchener. When you presented this strategy to council a few months ago, it was clear that **Make it Kitchener** is more than an economic development strategy. It is a way of capturing the intangible qualities that make our city an inspiring and exciting place to be.

Last year, my State of the City address focused on city building, and about how making smart and strategic investments into the community will benefit all of our citizens and our neighbourhoods.

This afternoon, I'd like to spend some time with you talking about what it means to **Make it Kitchener**.

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of Kitchener City Council, it's my pleasure to welcome you to the 2016 State of the City Address.

I'm sure that when you received your invitation to this year's event, you looked at the address and wondered "where in the world is *this* place?"

And then you likely hopped on Google Maps, and became even more confused. And then finally, you pulled into the parking lot and thought, "Surely this can't be the place!"

And yet here we are. We chose this location for today's event because it is quite literally, a physical representation of the Make it Kitchener philosophy.

Originally an industrial property, this space has seen generations of Kitchener makers. Built in 1955 by Rudolph Ardelt, it was originally home to Ardelt Industries of Canada. The company produced heavy steel machinery, including cranes, bridges, hoists and mining equipment.

Five decades later, and until recently, this property was occupied by Double R Steel who squared, beveled and rolled steel plates on this site until their growth initiated a recent move to Cambridge.

And today, this space has again become something new – in true **Make It Kitchener** fashion – thanks to property owner, Ron Doyle's vision.

41 Ardelt is now an intersection of arts and engineering that puts artists, artisans, and engineers all in one place. A dance studio, a global innovator in precision-making and world-renowned blacksmith work side by side on the property - a clear illustration that our legacy as an industrial city has transformed over time.

I want to thank Ron for making this space available to us today. And I'd like to thank him for dreaming creatively about this property as he did years ago about the Hacienda Sarria property. And most of all, for continually challenging all of us at city hall to believe in a future for Kitchener that stretches our comfort zone.

This space is exactly what **Make it Kitchener** is about – how we all have the potential to take the spark of an idea, and turn it into something that transforms how people live, experience their community, and connect with one another. We may not all be entrepreneurs, artists, or industrialists – but **we are all makers**.

MAKING IT TOGETHER

Together, we are **making it Kitchener**.

Collectively, with the input of more than 3,000 citizens, we have crafted a strategic plan that will guide council and staff over the next four years. Approved by council late last year, it is a plan that, when delivered on, will advance our vision for Kitchener to thrive as an innovative, caring and vibrant place. A city where you can make a good living, and live a great life.

Our strategic plan reflects the five clear priorities you identified as critical to making Kitchener thrive:

Open Government. A strong and resilient economy. Safe and thriving neighbourhoods. A sustainable environment and sustainable infrastructure. And, of course - efficient and effective city services.

In and of themselves, these priorities could belong to any city. It is how we will deliver on these priorities that will **Make it Kitchener**.

Because while our strategic plan gives us the blueprint for success, **Make it Kitchener** gives us the license to think big and dream bigger. Not simply as an economic development strategy – but as a philosophy. It gives us the ability to imagine our city as a conduit for game-changing ideas. As an engine of innovation.

Together, we can advance a collective vision for this city and our region – a vision that will see our community thrive as an innovative, caring and vibrant place to make a good living – and to live a great life.

INNOVATION

We have already seen the impact the **Make It** philosophy can have in inspiring game-changing ideas. Over the past five years, the *Innovation District* in downtown Kitchener has been transformed from an underutilized space into a dynamic, vibrant destination.

It is now known as the destination for those who want to be close to the great minds and great talent **making it innovative** in Kitchener. Closely connected to incubators, education and transportation amenities, the Innovation District has become home to some of the world's biggest brands.

Google. Manulife. Deloitte. Canadian Tire, General Motors, Canon and Thomson-Reuters, to name just a few. These major brands have all seen the value in being part of an ecosystem that inspires innovation and connectivity – **making it**, what Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called “an extraordinary hub of innovation at the cutting edge of the global economy.”

The potential to **make it in Kitchener** is limitless. Companies like Vidyard, Thalmic, Mapped In, Desire 2 Learn and NetSuite have been thriving in downtown Kitchener, where they are growing and strengthening our economy, remain committed to staying in the core and inspiring the next generation of makers to leave their mark.

In fact, companies like Igloo, which has experienced 70 per cent year-over-year growth for three years in a row, and who will significantly expand their workforce in 2016 – say that their ability to **make it** is directly related to

their experience in Kitchener. Their employees *thrive* working downtown, and they believe strongly in helping to revitalize the heart of the city as a vibrant place to live, and to enjoy life.

And while the brick-and-beam buildings and urban vibrancy of downtown is a key feature for many tech companies – it's not the only ingredient that enables business and industry to **make it in Kitchener**.

Rapidly growing companies like Miovision, who just celebrated their 10th anniversary, operate in the south end of Kitchener and are currently exploring some exciting new options because of their continued rapid growth.

Advanced manufacturers like Clearpath Robotics, who, like Igloo, was recently recognized by the *Globe and Mail* as one of Canada's Top 100 employers, is located in the Huron Business Park. Clearpath is **making it** in Kitchener. Six short years ago, it was a company of four people – by the end of this year, they expect to employ 200.

One of the greatest strengths we have as a community is our ability to connect with the innovative companies like those I've mentioned. These game-changing companies not only provide great career opportunities for the makers, the dreamers and the doers in our region – they challenge us and inspire us to continue thinking big – to **make Kitchener** smarter, more connected and more complete.

Making it smarter is something Ward 1 Councillor Scott Davey is passionate about. He was a vocal proponent of council's recent decision to invest \$9.6 million in implementing narrowband adaptive controls as part of our LED streetlight replacement project.

This significant project will not only see us pay off the investment in eight years from reduced power consumption, it will also provide the necessary backbone required to enable 'smart' initiatives like smart parking and smart metering.

This is the kind of decision that enables us to think about what it will take for citizens to make it in Kitchener, not just today – but in the years ahead. And it's the kind of decision that sets the stage for even bigger thinking about the investments needed to make Kitchener a digitally advanced city.

Over the past year, significant consultation has taken place on Kitchener's digital strategy. From a forum with our tech leaders to social media engagement, we have looked to you to understand what 'digital Kitchener' means to you. And we've heard very clearly that you see our digital strategy as a way to **make it connect**: to enable innovation through information and technology while creating a more tech savvy community.

You've told us that our digital strategy should be a tool that supports a more connected, inclusive, innovative and 'on demand' city. You value public wifi and fibre, and improved digital access, digital literacy, and digital self-service.

Connected. Inclusive. Innovative. These values are woven inherently into our identity and our persona – they are what **makes us Kitchener**.

NEIGHBOURHOODS

There is no question that our ability to innovate – to think big and take bold action – makes us a competitive, desirable city for businesses big and small. But when we ask these businesses what keeps them here, it's this: that **making it in Kitchener** is about **more than making a good living**. It's about **making a great life**.

It's about the communities, the connections, the experiences and the opportunities that bring vibrancy and energy to our city - making Kitchener a magnet for the skilled dreamers and doers who make our city one of a kind.

It is the connections people make with each other that are the meaningful and memorable parts of life. These connections must be supported by great places, spaces and neighbourhoods that are as distinct and diverse as the residents that define them.

Last year, we jumped in with both feet to develop Kitchener's first ever Neighbourhood Strategy. We celebrated the start of this work with our first ever city-wide Neighbours Day, and we presented our first Mayor's City Builder awards.

And in the following weeks, we will be launching our neighbourhood strategy publicly with a launch party on April 26th, the 2nd annual Neighbours Day on June 11th and a comprehensive city-wide consultation about neighbourhoods in the coming months.

In the lemonade stand consultations we've done thus far, we've discovered some interesting things:

- 62% of you love spending time with your family, friends and neighbours;
- 38% love hanging out in the city's parks, trails and natural areas;
- how you move through your neighbourhood is as important as the natural resources you enjoy within it.

And we've discovered that we are all makers. Together, we are making our communities safer, more complete, and more connected – in ways that are, quite literally, made by you.

In the Central Frederick neighbourhood, the Frederick Street Art Walk brings people together as they meander through some of the city's finest old homes, admiring artwork and appreciating the company of friends and strangers on front porches and city sidewalks. They make it beautiful.

Folks in Schneider Creek, describe their 'hood as a *"quiet little pocket of homes, businesses, and a centre for the arts"*. They celebrate their unique footprint in the city with a porch party that brings together musicians and community members. They make it fun.

And after watching neighbours in the Highland Stirling community group come together to build a cob oven – a traditional outdoor oven made of clay, sand and straw bricks - residents in Cherry Park worked together to build their own cob oven – warming up their neighbourhood and bringing people together to make, and break bread. They make it delicious.

In these simple and personal ways, we are making connections, making memories – making life interesting, meaningful and memorable. **Making it Kitchener.**

In Ward 5, Councillor Kelly Galloway-Sealock has worked side by side with her neighbours to form the Williamsburg Community Association, secure a location for the Williamsburg Community Centre and most of all, advocate for and see delivered in Budget 2016, dollars for a much-needed southwest park where residents can gather and play: Making it connect.

Across the city, Ward 2 Councillor Dave Schneider's placemaking efforts look a little different. He's been championing the addition of an all-season ping-pong table to Tremaine Park – creating a space that will bring people together in new ways in this suburban 'hood: Making it fun.

In Sarah Marsh's Ward 10, citizens in the Mount Hope Neighbourhood, concerned about traffic at a key intersection in their community, worked together with city staff to implement a stunning work of art. The Ahrens Street mural slows people down in a unique and distinct way: Making it safer.

These are only a few ways that together, we are making our neighbourhoods safer, more connected, and more complete. It is stories like these that resonate with me – and as we've seen through our #LoveMyHood series on social media – they resonate with you too.

The #LoveMyHood campaign, a labour of love by Laura McBride and Cailyn Scott, has been one of our most successful social campaigns to date. What began as an opportunity for you to tell us what makes Kitchener home for you, has become a stunning testimonial to the people and places that define life in our city.

To date, the #LoveMyHood Facebook campaign has reached more than 325,000 thousand people.

More than 6,700 people have 'liked it' in total.

It has been shared 432 times.

And the most popular story in this series was this one:

The story of Gladys and Mahfouz, who emigrated here from Lebanon nearly 10 months ago because of Mahfouz' job as a software developer. They came to our region after being told that it is the Silicon Valley of Canada. And like thousands of others, **they are making it in Kitchener**. Not only because of Mahfouz's job – but because of their neighbours, their neighbourhood, and their connection to a city that embraced them.

It shouldn't be a surprise that Gladys and Mahfouz are finding their place here in Kitchener. Our region has a remarkable legacy for helping newcomers like them.

In response to Canada's commitment to welcome 25,000 Syrian refugees, our region opened its arms, settling more than 1,000 refugees in Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge, thus becoming a leader in Canada's nation building initiative.

And like the thousands of other new Canadians who have come before them to our community, I know that whatever the challenges of their past, our newest neighbours will find that they too, can **make it in Kitchener**.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

It's safe to say that when it comes to **making it Kitchener**, one thing we can count on is that we are a community of makers who want to work together to see our city thrive.

Time after time, you have answered our call for feedback to help shape Kitchener's future.

Our strategic plan is a reflection of the priorities you defined as critical to the future of our city. Your overwhelming engagement in the development of our neighbourhood strategy will make our communities safer, more complete, and more connected. And your participation in our economic development strategy ensured that our work over the next four years will drive decisions that will continue to make Kitchener a city in which you can **make a good living, and live a great life**.

As a member of the Economic Development Advisory Committee, Ward 6 Councillor Paul Singh is a strong supporter of Kitchener's drive to become a destination for new and growing businesses, and a compelling city in which to live. In his own ward, Paul is seeing the results of his advocacy for smart planning come to life as the former Kitchener Utilities facility on Elmsdale Drive is being revitalized as a dynamic and vibrant mixed use space that will boast commercial and office spaces, restaurants and residential buildings. Making it new.

In the heart of the city, we have an unprecedented opportunity to shape our future with the sale of the Schneider's property. While this is private land, we as elected leaders must ensure that we seize the opportunity with the eventual purchaser to make decisions that reflect our desire to see a combination of green space, bike paths, transit and mixed use development: making a community of the future.

And in Ward 8, Councillor Zyg Janecki's insight as a former planner has helped him work with the Belmont Village Business Improvement Area to help bring new life to this much-beloved unique shopping district in an established neighbourhood experiencing some new infill development, as well.

As we work together to **make it Kitchener** in these new and existing communities, we know that there is tremendous power in understanding and appreciating the value of our city's history, and our shared heritage.

Throughout his time on council, Ward 9 Councillor Frank Etherington has brought a thoughtful perspective to many heritage conversations around the council table as we have considered a number of important decisions, including the approval of new best practices that will further strengthen our ability to proactively preserve our history.

But when it comes to preserving our built history – we can't make it on our own. We are inspired by the support of private-sector developers who have the vision and inspiration to transform the brick and beam spaces that once belonged to makers of the past, into vibrant and dynamic spaces for the makers of today, and tomorrow.

As we focus on making our economy stronger, and making Kitchener a compelling city in which to live, Ward 7 Councillor Bil Ioannidis is among the first to remind us that to succeed – we need to make it vibrant. An unwavering champion of the impact that music, arts and entertainment industries can have on our economy; Bil has been a vocal supporter of our efforts to build our brand as a festival city.

And our efforts to make it vibrant are seeing that brand come to life.

The success of iconic music festivals in Kitchener – like the Blues Festival and KOI has helped to cement our reputation as a city that makes it rock, helping attract new events like the CMT Country Music Festival. These festivals and events inject millions of dollars of revenue into our city, while also making Kitchener an exciting place to live, and to visit.

While these mainstream pop-culture events help to build our brand as festival city, we know that to truly make it vibrant in Kitchener, investing in arts and culture is not a nice to have – it is a must have. We must continue to support the many talented artists in our own community, as we make strategic decisions affecting sustainability of our arts community, and its iconic institutions.

As a long-time supporter of the Centre in the Square, Ward 3 Councillor John Gazzola was a crucial voice at the table as council approved a new mandate for this organization – a mandate that ensures popular arts and entertainment and local arts and culture programming can co-exist to meet visitors' needs. This is a decision that will make arts and entertainment in our region sustainable for years to come.

INFRASTRUCTURE

We know that making Kitchener a compelling place to live requires strong urban design, and exciting and vibrant experiences that contribute to a great lifestyle. But we also know that to compete as a city and a region, we need to make it connect: creating opportunities for people to spend more time living, dreaming, and doing - and less time commuting.

We are a city that does business far beyond our borders. And right now, there is no greater connection that we can make than the one we are building with Toronto as we champion the Toronto-Waterloo Region Innovation Corridor.

With more than 200,000 tech and financial sector workers spread from the GTA to our region, more than 15,000 tech companies and more than 5,200 startups, the Toronto-Waterloo Region corridor is the undisputed centre of our country's knowledge based economy.

This is a message local mayors Doug Craig, Dave Jaworsky and I delivered together with Toronto Mayor John Tory during our recent business development trip to Silicon valley. We met with startups, venture capitalists, talented ex-pats and others, highlighting the many assets that give our corridor the competitive advantage.

We told these audiences about the great living and great lifestyle our region offers. But what we couldn't tell them is that moving through the corridor is efficient and effortless.

Congested highways and inefficient train schedules make life difficult for those currently commuting in the corridor. Access to two-way, all-day GO and/or high-speed rail trains would be transformational; enabling people to spend less time commuting and more time connecting.

To **make it connect** – to realize our full potential as a global innovation hub, we need a bold vision and even bolder leadership from government, the private sector and the education sector. We need the confidence that we can take on the world and win. And, together with my colleagues, I will be working with our federal and provincial governments to make this our collective priority.

Of course, we also need to ensure that the infrastructure we're building within our borders can connect the thousands of people who are already here. We need varied and diverse commuting options that will move people throughout our city and our region, **making it complete**.

We are almost halfway into construction of light rail transit in Waterloo Region. In Kitchener, the construction has not been without its challenges. Prolonged street closures have been difficult and stressful, and the ever-changing detours make it confusing to get around. Still – we forge ahead, recognizing that the investment we're making today, will make our community more complete for tomorrow.

And in fact – as we forge ahead – we do so alongside some of our city's boldest and bravest makers. Like the first residents of the City Centre condos and One Victoria condos, who have chosen to **make it** in the heart of the city – pioneers of Kitchener's new urban lifestyle.

And the bullish restaurateurs – recent ones, like B@THEMUSEUM, the Berlin, the Grand Trunk Saloon, Rhapsody Barrel Bar, Amaya, the Mercury Café, who have joined longer-standing ones like Gilt, TWH Social, 271 King, McCabe's, Café Pyrus and more – who are individually making great food in our city's core, but are collectively making the downtown a destination for great food, a great time, and a great sense of community.

These bold new urban residents and brave new businesses will benefit from light rail transit. But to **make it complete**, we need to continue investing in infrastructure 'off the beaten path' – like the Iron Horse Trail.

Used more than 250,000 times a year, the Iron Horse trail is a prime commuter route, allowing residents and visitors the opportunity to move through the city by foot or by bike. Ward 4 Councillor Yvonne Fernandes knows a lot about the value of strong cycling infrastructure. An avid cyclist, she is a vocal champion of investments that will strengthen the safety and accessibility of Kitchener's cycling infrastructure.

Like the recent decision by council to approve a strategy that will see \$750,000 invested this year alone to improve and widen the central part of the Iron Horse Trail. Bolstered by an additional \$325,000 from the Federal Government, we will also be able to improve a one-kilometre section of the trail along Courtland Avenue to accommodate both cyclists and pedestrians, while also improving the safety of this stretch of the trail.

OPEN GOVERNMENT/STRONG LOCAL GOVERNMENT

We've talked a lot today about what makes Kitchener an interesting, innovative and dynamic city. We've talked about our neighbourhoods, our diverse and adaptable economy, and our ability to dream big.

What allows us to succeed in these areas, and as a city as a whole, is that together, **we make it work**. We make it work through a strong local government that listens to you – our citizens – as we make the important and sometimes difficult decisions that will shape our future.

For example, in our strategic plan consultation we heard that you expect us to think big – but to also deliver innovation and transformation within our means. We are committed to that. This year, council approved a 1.46 per cent tax increase, right in line with the rate of inflation. This tax rate increase will allow us to maintain the service levels you rely on.

We also made the difficult decision this year to raise water rates by 7.6 per cent and sewer rates by 10.8 per cent to address the critical state of our city's infrastructure. While not an easy decision, to have kept utility rates status quo would have threatened our ability to provide basic services to our citizens in the future. A long-term strategy to address the backlog of aging infrastructure is necessary to make our city work. These rate increases are difficult - but when combined with the tax increase, Kitchener continues to be one of the most affordable cities in the province in which to live.

While we are making these decisions locally, we know we are not the only Canadian municipality facing these kinds of challenges. As a member of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and in particular the Big City Mayor's Caucus, I regularly ensure that Kitchener's voice on this, and other key issues, is heard – with our partners both at the provincial and federal levels. This year, more so than any other, we have seen how powerful the municipal perspective can be in shaping the national agenda. The issues that you have told us matter – transit, infrastructure, affordable housing – have been reflected in the federal government's budget, released just recently. As a city, we look forward to seeing how these commitments will impact life in our city, and in our region.

As your elected leaders, we know we can't make it work without you. Your voice, your values, your vision for making it Kitchener, is the greatest asset we have. And we are committed to making it work, together, with you.

Through the neighbourhood strategy, we have seen the power of taking public consultation out of city hall and into the community.

And now, we are expanding the ways in which you can interact with Kitchener even further, making it easier for you to share your feedback online.

In 2014, 87 per cent of citizens that responded to our Environics survey indicated a strong desire to engage with our city electronically. And later this month we will launch a new tool, Engage Kitchener, to support you in doing just that. Engage Kitchener is an electronic platform that will allow you to weigh in on feature topics – like the City Hall Outdoor Spaces Project and the upcoming chicken coop by law consultation – in meaningful and interesting ways.

Engage Kitchener will provide an opportunity for those who don't typically get involved in democratic decision-making to have their say in **Making it Kitchener**.

I am looking forward to seeing how together, these new voices can help us make our city stronger. More innovative. More caring. More inclusive. And more connected. And I know that our city staff feels the same way. There is no higher calling in terms of a career than working in the public service. Every day, staff embraces the chance to make a difference in the lives of their neighbours, their neighbourhoods, and their city.

It is their commitment to making it together – with you – that supports our ability to thrive as a city, and as a community.

CONCLUSION

From Kaufman, Arrow and Electrohome to today's Velocity grads, Kitchener is a city of makers.

We have been cultivating innovation in this city for more than 150 years. And our moments of great transformation haven't happened in isolation. They are the result of pooled creative energy, shared wisdom, and a common pursuit of big dreams.

To make it in Kitchener, means hard work. But as they say, many hands makes light work.

Kitchener's strategic plan and economic development plan were created with you, for you. They outline our promise as your elected officials and as city staff, to support you as we work together to build a better city.

Make it Kitchener is more than just an economic development strategy. It is one of the most powerful narratives we have ever written about what it means to live, work, and thrive in our city.

And it's an invitation.

An invitation to join us.

The makers. The hackers. The crafters. The builders. The big businesses and small, the neighbourhood associations and community service clubs. The private investors and public servants.

You've made shirts, ties, cold cuts, cookies, software, hardware and art. You've made business plans, diagrams, financial statements and insurance policies.

You've raised barns, built homes and connected roads, railways and each other. You've lifted the hood, mixed up the ingredients, unveiled the hidden beauty in our city and have been fearless with your hands and your minds.

We couldn't make it without ***you***.

You make it here in Kitchener.

You make Kitchener.

Thank you