

Mayor Berry Vrbanovic's 2019 State of the City Address

**Change is never easy and it often creates discord, but when people come together for the good of humanity and the Earth, we can accomplish great things.**

These words, spoken by David Suzuki serve as a reminder that regardless of who we are, the corner of the world we come from, or the language we speak – we are united by a shared responsibility – to protect the Earth – for ourselves – and for future generations.

And so, I'd like to begin by acknowledging the lands on which we gather today - recognizing that the city of Kitchener is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples.

In acknowledging these lands, we also pay homage to our city's first environmental stewards. I would also like to acknowledge the enduring knowledge, presence and deep-rooted traditions of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples who continue to enrich our community to this day.

Good evening and thank you all for being here tonight.

As I stand before you, reflecting on Mr. Suzuki's words, I can agree that change is never easy. For many, the word change carries with it a sense of uncertainty. We have a tendency to resist what we do not know – ideas, concepts and ways of doing things that are new to us or that challenge our understanding of the world and the way we have come to see it.

But, the City of Kitchener and its people have never viewed change in this way. We don't fear or resist change, but rather, we embrace it. We are resilient and see change as an opportunity – for growth, development, and prosperity. Change to us means a better city – a vibrant, innovative and caring city, achieved through continuous progress.

We are leaders of change and we recognize that our strength comes from our willingness to adapt - to continuously reimagine, rethink, and reshape how we do things. We are deliberate, strategic, and forward thinking in our approach. Together, we walk confidently in the direction of change, **because we know we are changing for the good.**

## **KOF**

It's befitting that I address you tonight in the Kitchener Operations Facility, or the KOF as many have come to know it. The KOF is a symbol for the kind of forward thinking, transformational change Kitchener embraces. A former tire plant, this space was redeveloped with a sustainable lens for a new purpose as Kitchener's consolidated maintenance facility. More than that, it is an example of how, we as a City, made a conscious decision **to change for the good.**

I think back to when we first began making plans for the KOF. We saw the opportunity – a decade ago – to make bold decisions that would have a positive impact on the sustainability of – and a greener future for - our city.

By installing what was at the time Canada's largest solar rooftop on this building, we have been able to generate an average of four-hundred-thousand dollars worth of electricity per year to contribute to the grid. In fact, we were able to generate enough revenue that the investment in this rooftop paid for itself in five years instead of the expected seven – making this both a sustainably-conscious decision, AND a good business decision.

The KOF is a tremendous example of how, as a city, we can lead by example and choose to **change for the good**.

By virtue of its design, the KOF represents our vision for a better, more caring city, but it's the hard work and dedication of its staff that carries this vision through to fruition each and every day. From the water we drink, to the streets we travel - to the energy used to heat our homes, many of the people who deliver the vital city services Kitchener citizens value most work here. Tonight, we thank you for the meaningful work you do to ensure all citizens can live a great life in our city. Your efforts make all the difference in our community.

It has been said that if you want to know what a city's priorities are, look no further than its budget. I am sure that my council colleagues would join me in noting that Kitchener's 2019 budget is one that enables us to continue delivering the high-quality services citizens expect, while we continue to innovate, to lead, and to **embrace change for the good**.

In 2019, we are focused on positive change that will ensure Kitchener is strong, safe and livable today, and for our children and grandchildren.

### **Changing for the good - transportation**

I know I speak for my council colleagues when I say that the number one thing we heard from people as we knocked on doors late last year was the need to change how we move through our city. Our streets need to be safer, more connected, and more inclusive – meaning that whether you're eight or you're 80, you can move through Kitchener on foot, on two wheels or on four, or any number in between.

As a Council, one of the most compelling stories we heard for safer streets came from two engaged residents: Josh Gibbons and his 11-year old son Caleb. We met Josh and Caleb during our public consultation session on the budget.

When they spoke to us, Josh and Caleb expressed their enthusiasm for biking around our city. But as a caring and concerned parent, Josh also voiced his reluctance to allow Caleb to bike to school out of concern for his safety. He spoke about the challenges they faced by speeding traffic, and a network that is disconnected, making it hard to get where they want to go.

Josh and Caleb's story is a powerful one – and it's a story that can be heard in every ward in our city. It's a story that highlights the challenges confronting every parent, every commuter, and every citizen travelling within our city. It reminds us that active forms of transportation should not be reserved for the most adventurous or courageous amongst us – they should be seen as safe modes of transportation available to all travellers – regardless of their age, or level of experience.

I want to live in a city where residents like Caleb feel empowered to walk or bike to school. I want to live in a city where parents like Josh, don't fear for their child's safety during their morning commute. And so – to make it easier for Josh and Caleb and thousands of others to move through our city, we are **changing transportation for the good** in a number of ways, starting this year.

We are implementing change in the form of a pilot project that will see a five-kilometer continuous network of protected bike lanes installed on our streets. This network will make it easier and safer for people to get from the suburban landscape of the Westheights Neighbourhood in Bill Ioannidis' Ward 7, to Belmont Village in Margaret Johnson's Ward 8 and further into the downtown core.

And we're implementing a change in the design of a pre-existing roundabout in Kelly Galloway-Sealock's Ward 5. Any pedestrian or cyclist in the city will likely tell you that approaching roundabouts of the size and scale of this one near Huron Heights Secondary School can be intimidating and stressful, even if you're a confident non-car commuter. Implementing a Dutch roundabout design will provide a better path for pedestrians and cyclists to feel more confident travelling through this high volume area. **Changing for the good** also means acknowledging that we need to address the increase in speeding in our neighbourhoods, to make them safer for everyone.

We have seen the successful impact resident-led traffic calming initiatives can have in our neighbourhoods, like the Walking on Sunshine Crosswalk located at Lancaster Street East and Chapel Street in Sarah Marsh's Ward 10.

In Dave Schneider's Ward 2, the installation of flexible delineators helped to slow cars down in front of Lackner Woods Public School, giving parents a sense of relief that the area would be safer for the large number of kids that walk to school in that neighbourhood.

This year, we've expanded funding for solutions like flexible delineators and rotational speed advisory sign supports, allowing both residents and councillors to have a say in addressing speed in the areas that matter most in their own wards.

While these traffic-calming measures are effective, they are only part of the solution. Consider that a pedestrian struck by a vehicle travelling at fifty kilometers per hour has a survival rate of less than fifty per cent. And, a pedestrian has almost no chance of surviving the impact of a vehicle travelling at eighty kilometers per hour.

These statistics make a compelling case for why reducing speed limits on city streets to forty kilometers an hour will enhance safety for not only pedestrians, but also cyclists, and drivers. This will allow parents like Josh to feel more confident allowing kids like Caleb to walk or bike to school.

Slowing down vehicle traffic in neighbourhoods is not an issue unique to Kitchener – our neighbours in Waterloo share the desire for safer streets in our region. And so this year, staff in both Kitchener and Waterloo will be working together to review and pilot forty kilometer an hour speed limits in a designated neighbourhood in each of our cities. This is one of only several initiatives our two cities are collaborating on this year, as we work together to make not only our cities, but our entire region safer and more livable.

In and of themselves, these changes – to our cycling network and infrastructure and streets – are good changes. Changes that will have an immediate and positive impact on how people are able to move through our city, and on the quality of life of our residents. Together, they are an example of how as a city, we are not afraid to **change for the good**.

## **Economy**

One only has to look to the ION Corridor to see how changing the way we move through our city, and our region, can have a dramatic and positive impact on our city.

In Kitchener, we've never failed to see the opportunity change brings. And, we have a history of welcoming change with enthusiasm. We've worked hard to demonstrate the compelling reasons to invest in Kitchener – attracting the best of the best in terms of developers, businesses and new industries.

It is undeniable that the addition of LRT to our community has had a transformational impact on both our physical landscape and our thriving economy.

From downtown Kitchener to the Kingsdale neighbourhood, investors and businesses are capitalizing on the opportunity to become part of the future of our city. And in many ways, these partners share our vision of **changing for the good**.

In downtown Kitchener, local developers like Perimeter are a significant and important part of the billion dollar building boom – the explosion of growth that will see eighteen developments rise up, transforming both our skyline and the communities within the downtown.

Perimeter's 345 King Street West is an example of the kind of leading developments that will support our city's **change for the good**. Perimeter is in the midst of transforming what was once a static parking lot into a stunning six-storey, LEED Gold Class A Office Building – the first new space like this in downtown Kitchener in more than 25 years. A building of this substance is the kind of design we look to all developers to bring to Kitchener: sustainable, environmentally responsible, and appealing to high-quality employers that are looking to capitalize on the knowledge economy booming in our city, and our region.

Perimeter is not alone in their pursuit of better development. In John Gazzola's Ward 3, international developer Cadillac Fairview is investing seventy-million dollars in the redevelopment of Fairview Park Mall to create the Cadillac Fairview Grand Market District - a mixed-use development that will revitalize this valuable part of our city as a destination that combines shopping, leisure, work and living spaces. Like Perimeter, Cadillac Fairview is also thinking about our collective future, with an eye to more sustainable development that includes fifteen-hundred solar panels, permeable pavement and dedicated stormwater facilities. This type of future thinking in any development is the kind of **change for the good** we embrace.

Perimeter and Cadillac Fairview are leaders to be sure, but they are not alone in their efforts to create a more sustainable city. Kitchener is home to many great businesses that see value in meaningful, responsible change. For businesses like JW Cultivations, transforming old spaces for new ventures has meant tremendous success for this family-owned company. In repurposing an old auto parts plant, JW Cultivations converted three-hundred and thirty seven-thousand square feet of production space and

eight-thousand square feet of office space to grow their medical cannabis operations to become the largest aeroponic producer of crop anywhere in the world.

We see more companies like JW Cultivations achieving and exceeding their goals, gravitating towards **change for the good** that makes our economy stronger and our city better today and into the future. These business partners are leaders in recognizing the importance of good growth – growth rooted in environmental stewardship. They show us that investing in green infrastructure enhances areas for growth, expansion and progress - now and in the years to come.

### **Change for the good – sustainability**

As a city, we need to do more than just celebrate and recognize the efforts of our partners in the private sector for their leadership in areas like sustainability. As a city, **we** need to do better – think bigger – and **lead by example**.

We need to keep changing for the good – so that our city is safe, strong and, livable not just today – but ten, twenty, fifty years from now.

We are at a pivotal moment in our history. Our climate is getting warmer, wetter and more unpredictable every day.

Intense, extreme weather events are becoming more commonplace. These occurrences damage our buildings, put pressure on our electrical and water systems and require us to respond, rebuild and repair what is lost. In June 2017, a significant weather event came in the form of a torrential rainstorm that caused water levels along the Grand River to rise so significantly, that they flooded the pool basin in Kiwanis Park – closing access to the public and delaying construction to update the pool until staff could remove debris and assess the extent of the damage. This is a small example – but one that highlights the impact these events can have on our physical environment in a very real way.

As a larger city, we have arguably the best opportunity and largest part to play in mitigating the effects of climate change.

Larger cities consume two-thirds of the world's energy and are accountable for seventy per cent of global C-O-2. Together, we can **change for the good** by turning our attention to making environmental leadership a priority for the City of Kitchener.

In unity with other nations around the world that have entered into the Paris Agreement, Kitchener must intensify our actions and investment to combat climate change. Nations and cities all over the world are collectively taking action in the global effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by eighty per cent by 2050.

So how does Kitchener fit into this global goal? Next week, Council will review our city's first-ever Corporate Climate Action Plan. Here's a glimpse at what's to come.

Next week, council will get a full look at this plan – a plan we know will be ambitious – but achievable. It's a plan that inspires **change for the good**, ensuring Kitchener's long term sustainability and success. We have a lot of work ahead of us – but it's work that is overdue, and work that we are ready to begin.

In our city fleet, we will make better use of electric powered vehicles to reduce the amount of fuel emissions we produce, resulting in cleaner air. We will also focus on sourcing new materials like biofuel, a plant-based solution, to power our fleet, lower our emissions and improve the air our citizens breathe. In our built environment, we will invest in greener infrastructure – like the building we’re in today.

Undertaking deep energy retrofits that will update older buildings to today’s standards and beyond, we will make use of the most efficient solutions as a wise, long-term investment with proven return. In our streetlight network, we will continue to leverage our smart LED system, which has so far reduced our greenhouse gas emissions by up to three hundred tons, and saved the city over a million dollars in energy costs annually.

We will also look to mitigate the effects of climate change that we’re experiencing every year by investing in our natural environment.

For example, we will advance an urban forest strategy that includes an accelerated tree-planting program to address the existing backlog in street-tree planting. Across the City, we’ll also improve the resiliency of our urban forests and preserve the tree canopy through an emergency response and recovery plan – better protecting homeowners in areas where mature trees can become a threat in the event of severe windstorms.

Putting forward measures to mitigate and adapt to the effects of the global climate crisis improves our city’s resiliency, allowing our infrastructure to withstand extreme weather systems, unpredictable temperatures, flooding, and high energy costs to save us money in the future.

Recently, I learned about the ancient Iroquois Seventh Generation Principle. The Seventh Generation takes its name from the Great Law of the Haudenosaunee, the founding document of the Iroquois Confederacy, the oldest living participatory democracy on Earth. It is based on an ancient Iroquois philosophy that ***in our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations.***”

This philosophy is not unique to just the Iroquois nation. Indigenous peoples around the world live by this philosophy – and it’s a philosophy we should embrace as we work together to **change for the good**, taking action on the challenge of climate change - understanding and acknowledging our role in this global responsibility – to the generations that come after us.

Together, as citizens, public servants, politicians and community leaders, we need to build on the great work of organizations like Sustainable Waterloo Region, Reep Green Solutions and Climate Action Waterloo Region who have long been leaders in our region. We need to collaborate, learn and work together on implementing tangible actions that will support our efforts to achieve an absolute reduction of eight per cent in greenhouse gas emissions by 2026.

I have every confidence that Kitchener citizens will rise to join us in the challenge confronting this. My confidence is driven in part by our history – it was right here in Kitchener that curbside recycling was launched, with the introduction of what is now a universally recognized symbol of recycling: the Blue Box, invented by Jack McInnis. This program, now more than 35 years old, received the first ever UN Environmental Award for its unique contribution to fighting pollution.

And my confidence is also driven by the creative and engaged citizens I talk to every day; citizens that believe in and care about our city's future. Across the city, environmental champions are actively engaged in making Kitchener a greener, more livable city.

In Debbie Chapman's Ward 9, the Lakeside Park resident group leveraged a two-thousand dollar Placemaking Challenge Grant through our LoveMyHood program to make their part of the city more sustainable. Together, these residents have developed a neighbourhood recycling program – making their 'hood more sustainable.

In Christine Michaud's Ward 4, students and staff at St. Kateri Tekakwitha Catholic Elementary School received a thousand dollar community garden grant to install an accessible garden at their school to learn more about caring for the earth.

Last year, in celebration of Earth Day, residents in Paul Singh's Ward 6 organized litter clean-up efforts in McLennan Park to maintain this much-loved hub of activity in their community. And on Earth Day, later this month, the annual Kolb Park clean-up will take place in Scott Davey's Ward 1 with neighbours working together to do their part to benefit the environment.

It's examples like these that speak volumes about Kitchener's ability to see opportunity and to seize it – to empower residents to take the lead, or to join us as together, we **change for the good**.

## **Regional Review**

But, building a great city – a safe, connected, livable city - is not the work of one government, one municipality, or one person alone. It involves thoughtful progress achieved in the spirit of collaboration. Working with our federal, provincial and regional partners, we make bold decisions that support our vision for the future for our city. These relationships empower our region to grow, to innovate and to lead.

A great example of this took place just a few weeks ago, with the Cambridge Fire Department working with our Kitchener Fire Department to consolidate their dispatch operations at Kitchener Fire's Headquarters. This dispatch centre now serves all three cities in Waterloo Region, as well as the four townships in our region – improving efficiency and ensuring better service for the citizens that rely on our distinct fire services.

Waterloo region is one of the best examples of effective and cooperative two-tier municipal governance in the province. We deliver efficient, effective services. We balance continued growth and world-class innovation. And, we create safe and caring communities for our citizens. We do this successfully because of our willingness to work together, to listen, and to shape our future in the way that best serves the needs of the communities we serve in this region.

Broad and meaningful consultation is a hallmark of who we are at the City of Kitchener. As the provincial review of regional government continues, it is important that we listen to, and understand the perspective of our citizens – seeking meaningful input on an important decision affecting the order of government closest to their day-to-day lives.

That's why Kitchener is launching a public engagement survey in the coming weeks - to ensure that in addition to the participation opportunities available in the regional and provincial public consultation

processes, the unique perspective of Kitchener's residents is represented and articulated to the province through the results of a statistically valid survey.

I remain steadfast in my view that the citizens in this region should have a say in our collective future. That regardless of the desired end state the province sees as a result of the regional review, the municipalities within Waterloo region should have the ownership in creating our path to get there.

Because we know when we work together, we can **change for the good** in a way that best serves the needs of our community.

## **Conclusion**

Earlier, I acknowledged that change is never easy.

**Changing for the good** – of our economy, our safety, and our planet takes vision, determination, and time. But, most of all, it takes courage.

It takes courage to change our perspective and practices.

It takes courage to change the outcome of our collective future.

We've had the courage and the foresight to embrace change before. I know we have the courage and the fortitude to continue to **change for the good** - to ensure prosperity and security for Kitchener for our children and grandchildren.

Our city has a culture of setting long-term vision and achieving our goals. We have a history of showing leadership, putting forward policies and processes that reflect the very best of our city and its people. This tradition will continue.

It's easy to be skeptical – to think that our actions can't make a difference in the face of a global crisis – but, I promise you they can.

Our actions, however small they may seem, can do so much.

And so, as we stand on the cusp of change – looking toward the future with greater optimism and enthusiasm – I hope you share my confidence in the incredible things we will do and achieve together. Because, change for Kitchener is strength. It's community. It's prosperity.

**And above all, it's good.**