

**Mayor Berry Vrbanovic**  
**Inauguration Speech**  
**Dec. 3, 2018**

**Check against Delivery**

Your Excellency Ambassador Matkovic, Consul General Javor, Regional Chair Redman and Regional Councillors, Former Mayors Zehr and Christy, former members of Kitchener Council, Police Chief Bryan Larkin, Fire Chief Jon Rehill, members of the City of Kitchener Public Service, honoured guests....

Good evening and welcome to the inaugural council meeting for the 2018-2022 City Council. On behalf of members of council and myself, I would like to thank you for joining us for this special occasion, as a new council for the City of Kitchener takes office.

On October 22, Kitchener residents made an important decision – they exercised their democratic right to vote and decided which elected officials would represent them in their municipal government. The elected officials sworn in today will guide our city for the next four years, advancing community priorities that will make Kitchener a great place for everyone to live, work, and play.

It is an honour and a privilege to be sworn in this evening as your returning Mayor and to again find myself in a position to lead council as we work together to build a better Kitchener - a city for everyone.

When we come together, as a government, as a people, and as a community, our vision for a more caring Kitchener comes into focus. Kitchener's citizens have placed their trust in us to lead the continued development of our city as an innovative, caring and vibrant community. As I look at my new council colleagues, I am confident that together, we will build on the success of our outgoing council, championing a vision for a Kitchener that is defined by its strong neighbourhoods, safe communities, growing economy, and inclusive culture.

The one thing we all share – regardless of the ward we represent, or the path we've taken to pursue this important role in public service – is a passion for our city, and a belief in its people.

To our newly elected members of council - Christine Michaud, Margaret Johnston and Debbie Chapman - welcome. I look forward to working with you on issues I know you are passionate about - building more connected neighborhoods, increasing resident participation in decision-making, and prioritizing positive, collaborative change.

With seven of our city councillors returning to office, I am pleased to welcome back Scott Davey, Dave Schnider, John Gazzola, Kelly Galloway-Sealock, Paul Singh, Bil Ioannidis, and Sarah Marsh. I look forward to continuing our work together to provide creative solutions that will create stronger neighbourhoods and help grow our economy.

The election of this group of 10 men and women also marks a moment in history for Kitchener City Council. It is the first time that we have a gender-balanced municipal council, made up of 5 women and 5 men. Just last month, our national organization, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities launched a new program called "Towards Parity". The objective was to create a movement to support women in overcoming systemic and other barriers so one day we would reach gender parity. Well in the City of Kitchener it's 2018, and we've already done that. I am extremely proud of our community and the opportunity to be working with this dynamic and dedicated group.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my sincerest thanks and gratitude to those whose active role on our council has ended - Yvonne Fernandes, Zyg Janecki, and Frank Etherington. Thank you for your time and your service – today we look back on our accomplishments and celebrate our moments of achievement. In doing so, I hope you look fondly on our years together and our many collaborative efforts to help our city and its people achieve great things.

I would also like to acknowledge and express my appreciation to all the candidates who ran in this year's municipal election. Your passion for our city is demonstrated by your willingness to serve its people. Thank you for being a part of our democratic process.

I must admit, as I address you again, now as your returning Mayor, I share the same feeling of anticipation and enthusiasm to lead our city as I did when I first took office. Excited for the future of this city, humbled to be an agent of change, and grateful for the trust placed in me by Kitchener citizens, I can truly say that it has been an honour and profoundly rewarding experience to serve as your Mayor.

I've always enjoyed meeting and connecting with Kitchener residents. During my 2014 campaign, it was both energizing and motivating to knock on doors and speak with citizens face-to-face to learn more about their hopes and visions for our city. I think back to a young woman that I met when I visited the Chicopee neighbourhood who was excited to be voting for the first time. She understood that the government she would help elect could bring about positive changes in her neighbourhood and with that knowledge she cast her ballot.

Residents like the young woman I just described, remind me of the importance of public service and the significant role it plays in the everyday life of our citizens. It has been my privilege to be a life-long public servant – both as a staff and in an elected capacity. Together with my colleagues on council, I had the tremendous opportunity to shape the future of this city during the past term.

I feel a great sense of pride in what we've been able to accomplish together during the past four years. It's hard to believe that in such a short period of time, we launched our award-winning Love My Hood Neighbourhood Strategy. This resident-led, city-supported initiative empowers residents by giving them the resources and guidance they need to do great things in their neighbourhoods. We spoke to thousands of residents, whose voices and perspectives are reflected in numerous initiatives, building great places and encouraging more connected people, and working together to achieve a desired aim.

Involving residents in the decision making process has allowed us to make great strides towards building a Kitchener that better reflects the needs of all of its citizens. In 2018, we conducted a community survey to capture an objective citizen perspective on residents' priorities for the future. I am proud to say that 87 per cent of Kitchener residents view their quality of life in our city as good or excellent. Our many parks and greenspaces, strong sense of community and wide range of programs and services makes our city an attractive, welcoming and inclusive place to live.

Through tools like the Environics survey, and our own EngageKitchener platform, public meetings and charrettes, we actively seek out the thoughts and opinions of those we serve. As a Council, we place tremendous value on hearing from – but more importantly, listening to our citizens.

We should take great pride in the work we've done to inspire progress that makes meaningful change in our neighbourhoods and in the everyday lives of citizens. In launching our participatory budgeting pilot project, we involved residents in updating parks located in the Sandhills and Elmsdale communities. We

engaged with citizens to gather ideas, develop concepts and make decisions to update these neighbourhood parks to ensure they served the growing needs of the people and families who live there.

When we empower our residents to play an active role in our decisions, we create opportunities for them to be heard, to contribute, and to feel represented and we eliminate the barriers that hold back our communities, stunt their growth, and stifle progress.

Moving Kitchener forward means creating continued opportunities for the people of this city to thrive. Council delivered on this mandate by paving the way for our economy to grow. Through our award-winning economic development strategy, Make it Kitchener, we've situated our city as the best place in Canada for innovators, entrepreneurs and other businesses to start and expand. We have worked collaboratively with the City of Toronto to launch the Toronto-Waterloo Innovation corridor, bringing along other municipal partners in places like Guelph and Halton along the way. We have also worked to support our large-scale legacy companies in the community while also ensuring that our small business cluster continues to thrive. We have and will continue to balance the tremendous growth of our city, while still maintaining its culture, character, and small town feel.

In reflecting on the accomplishments of the past, we look toward the future with a renewed sense of purpose and knowing there is still more work to do. Tonight, a new council joins me as we continue on our path towards progress. Reflecting on the steps we have already taken and mindful of the road in front of us, I look forward to our journey together.

Like any great journey, ours will begin with charting our course for the next four years. Together we will develop a new strategic plan that will map out the community's priorities for the coming term. Steadfast in our determination to do what is best for our city, we will bring about positive changes and creative solutions to create a diverse, vibrant, and caring community where every citizen can feel they belong.

Building on the strengths of our Love My Hood strategy, we will expand the Neighbourhood Action Program to include more neighbourhoods across the city and allow for additional neighbourhood liaison supports to service communities that need them most.

Continuing to make Kitchener an innovative, caring, and vibrant city for residents to live, work, and play, involves learning more about what they value most. We will continue our practice of engaging residents in the decision making process, providing them with outlets to inform this council on issues and services that matter to them and affect their daily lives.

Public consultation has already begun to review our leisure facilities master plan, allowing residents a platform to speak to their physical activity preferences so we can determine how to invest in our city's leisure assets to meet their growing and changing needs.

We understand that supporting our citizens also means paving the way for them to lead healthy, active lifestyles. By designing and implementing initiatives to encourage and promote physical activity regardless of age or ability, from our youngest to our oldest residents, we enrich the lives of our citizens and provide them with greater opportunities to stay healthy and enjoy a full life in our city.

Over the coming term we will demonstrate that our communities recognize the value of intergenerational connections by launching a Grandparents Day initiative. As a child, I benefitted greatly

from the relationships I shared with older adults in my community. Being 5-year-old who was new to Canada and without any relatives in the country, I looked forward to my interactions with Dorothy and Vernon Smith, an older adult couple who were our neighbours at the time - so much so, that with the help of my kindergarten teacher, I would ask the couple to sign an “adoption” contract I drafted declaring them my “artificial grandma and grandpa”.

While this document was far from legally binding, what it represented carried great meaning for me as a child. It spoke to an influential relationship from which I learned a great deal. A lot can be achieved in nurturing intergenerational relationships and, in putting this initiative forward; I hope the positive experience I benefitted from as a child will be shared in neighbourhoods across our city.

In the spirit of open, public discussion and transparency, our city will lead on issues such as climate change and in areas like customer service.

Helpful, caring, and proactive in our customer service strategy, we will continue with this approach to build strong relationships with our residents and provide them with the best possible experience. In the coming term, we will focus on establishing a single, user-first-focused website, giving residents easy access a wide range of services. From leaf collection dates, to property tax information, this platform will allow for a seamless customer service experience.

Providing excellent customer service also involves ensuring the safety of our pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers. Increasing our focus on traffic safety will be a priority for this new council, especially as our city moves in the direction of a more sustainable future. No parent should have to worry about the safety of his or her child walking home from school or playing on a neighbourhood street and members of the public should feel confident biking to work.

Working closely with the Region of Waterloo, we will aim to build a minimum grid of protected bike lanes and investigate the possibility of reducing speed limits on our neighbourhood streets. Lobbying the province to allow cameras to regulate speeding on regional roads and school zones will also be a necessary component of improving traffic safety in our community. Improving sidewalk snow clearing and pedestrian connections to transit stops will provide an ease of access for all residents travelling within our city.

Safe and effective transportation should also include expanding the reach of our people so each member of our community, regardless of their age or income status, can benefit. Public transit should be accessible to all – including older adults and those on a fixed income. Improvements to public transportation through innovation along the Toronto Waterloo Region Innovation corridor will increase accessibility for our residents, eliminating barriers and creating greater opportunities to live, work and play in our city and beyond. I will continue to be an advocate, working with our partners locally, provincially and federally to continue this discussion.

Through thoughtful development of our city, this council will prioritize the needs of residents and their families by encouraging the development of the full-spectrum of affordability in new housing units in Kitchener and within the region. This process will involve considering properties for potential investment. Recognizing that all Kitchener citizens, regardless of their income status, are deserving of a safe space to live, we as a community, must demonstrate a willingness to give support.

We will take on a leadership role in environmental stewardship, focusing our attention on reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and developing a neighbourhood-based Green Kitchener Fund, because we know that our responsibility to the planet involves being proactive in our commitment to a more sustainable future.

This term, we will continue to advance our leadership position in the region on smart city initiatives that improve service delivery and cost effectiveness for our residents. We are an innovative city with a thriving technology sector that pushes the boundaries of what's possible both here at home and in cities all over the world. With continued support for strategies like Digital Kitchener, our people and businesses will stay more connected and remain at the forefront of innovation for generations to come.

Through careful stewardship of tax dollars, we will continue to encourage and support growth and sustainability of our arts and creative sectors, recognizing that this investment will both enhance our residents' quality of life and be an integral step in growing our economy. Arts and culture contributes to the well-being of our city and serves as a powerful tool that can unite communities and act as a gateway for public discourse. Nurturing the arts in Kitchener will work to add vibrancy to our collective identity - as a people and as a city.

Building a caring city means advocating on behalf of the most vulnerable members of our community. Working with our regional and provincial partners, we will call attention to growing issues related to mental illness and addiction. With respect, understanding and compassion for those confronting these issues in their daily lives, we will do our part to help ensure they have access to the services and resources they need to feel supported and to realize a better future.

A caring Kitchener can only be achieved if the continuous growth of our communities benefits all citizens and if our neighbourhoods allow for everyone to feel they belong.

Ensuring citizens feel a sense of belonging in our city and in their community holds great significance for me - as your Mayor, but also as an immigrant to this country. When I immigrated to Canada from Croatia almost 50 years ago, my family did their best to settle into a foreign place, surrounded by new people, and confronted by a language barrier.

My experience is a shared one – as our city is a rich, mosaic of different cultures, ethnicities and religions – a diverse people who have come to call Kitchener home. It's important that our government evolves alongside its residents and that our priorities and practices reflect the diversity of the people and the community we serve. This is where our strength as a city comes from.

Early in 2019, I will be launching a Mayor's Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion where we will celebrate the many nuances of our people and continue to promote acceptance and belonging in our community. This initiative will ensure Kitchener is a city for everyone, one in which each citizen is welcomed by acceptance and understanding.

And so, this new council must continue its work to build strong neighbourhoods that are inclusive and representative of the collective. We will inspire thoughtful progress – supporting our city's growth in a measured manner to avoid gentrification. When we put forward new ideas to advance our neighbourhoods, we will be careful to maintain everyone's place within them.

We will manage tax dollars effectively and responsibly to ensure we create policies, strategies and solutions that better the lives of all our citizens and that help build community.

With gratitude for this incredible opportunity and with a clear vision for the future of this city, we will continue our work to serve the residents of Kitchener.

We have been given a mandate – to better our city and to lay the groundwork for the Kitchener of tomorrow. Citizens have placed their trust in us to make decisions on their behalf and with their needs and aspirations in mind. We will do what is right and what is best for them, always.

As a new council, we are united by the same goal and shared purpose – a caring Kitchener for all. We will not lose sight of this mandate and it will motivate all the work we do, because we know it matters. It matters to each and every citizen that our city feels like home and provides opportunity. It matters that we are a government that serves its people in a way that recognizes and understands their needs.

I look forward to collaborating with this new council; with trust and respect, we will pursue our shared passions, recognizing that good governance is not about unanimous agreement – it is about respectful, open and productive discourse in the pursuit of common ground.

In my last inauguration speech, I referenced a plaque that hangs in my office. It reads, “Successful is the person who lived well, laughed often and loved much, who gained the respect of children, who leaves the world better than they found it, who has never lacked appreciation for the earth’s beauty, who never fails to look for the best in others or give the best of themselves.”

I find these words to be as inspiring as they were four years ago.

I have seen the resilience, the passion, and the determination of our people and of this government. We will challenge ourselves to realize our city’s potential – to push the limits of even our own expectations to achieve great things. Positioning our city as a leader in innovation and customer service, Kitchener will continue to grow, develop, and progress, as will its people.

Today we begin this work, remembering that our vision for a caring Kitchener is best achieved together. And so, our work begins. We embark on our four-year journey, each of us with the belief that Kitchener is and will continue to be one of Canada’s most innovative and vibrant cities. Together, we walk in the direction of progress to create a more prosperous city, a welcoming city – a city for everyone.

Thank you.