

## **Mayor Drew Dilkens | Chamber Remarks | April 18, 2023**

### ***Capturing the Future: Windsor's Economic Potential***

Thank you to Rakesh and the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce for this opportunity to join you and to speak with you today.

I'd like to take a moment to recognize all Members of Council here today, as well as special guests, community leaders and community builders who have joined us this afternoon.

Working in municipal government is truly the most collaborative political environment in Canada today. Those who step-up to represent our community, to lead at this local level, do so because they are passionate about the City of Windsor and our region, and committed to doing their utmost to help make this community a better place to live, lay down roots, raise families, build careers, invest, dream and to grow.

I stand before you as Mayor, as the Head of Council, and I am proud to represent the Councillors who work with me every day. From issue to issue, through each opportunity and challenge, we set out to do good things for Windsor and its residents.

Before I proceed, I would like to express my gratitude to every Councillor present here today, as well as those who have served in the past. Your passion and contributions to this community are highly valued, and your hard work and dedication have not gone unnoticed. While we may not always see eye-to-eye on how to solve certain issues, our shared commitment and enthusiasm will propel us forward.

I'd also like to take a moment to thank all of you who are here this afternoon. I know that everyone in this crowd has multiple demands on their time, and that being here creates pressures for you elsewhere... and I'm thankful for your attendance today. All of you, in this room, are leaders and community builders in your own right.

In this complex, global economy that we all work and compete within, we know that government cannot turn the dial alone. Progress happens through partnerships, by forming strong and trusted bonds with business, labour, healthcare and academic leadership and the efforts of an entire community to drive the kinds of results that we all want to deliver for *our* Windsor.

Collectively, we have demonstrated a desire and a drive to build a strong city. To build a resilient, innovative, attractive and unique city that stands out - and stands proud in Ontario, in Canada, and in the world.

It is not simply the vision of any one person. And I'm not here today to speak with you about a "Drew Dilkens Plan" or even a "City Council Plan". Rather, I'm here – *we are here* – to give voice to the shared and bold vision we have all been talking up, talking about and talking around for years now.

**Today is about *Investing in Windsor* to build it into the *Great City* that it is poised to become.**

**Today is about building on all that we have been, and all that we have accomplished, to lay the foundation for all that is yet to come.**

**Today is about moving - in thought, and in action - from being a big small city, to a small big city. And that difference is important.**

Our collective hard work has brought us to this moment... and we are standing, together, at a threshold of unprecedented growth and evolution for our economy, our population and community; for our identity and our geographic location.

**Ladies and Gentlemen, I have never been more optimistic and excited about our City's future than I am today.**

I see it. I hear it. And I feel it.

And that's because I, like you, have been leaning forward, engaging and taking the reins when we could have sat back and let Destiny be our guide. We have created, funded, and moved forward with a broad variety of planning documents – road maps, if you will – that have fuelled our successes over the last decade.

There are asset management plans; economic development strategies; and master plans for Parks, Housing and Homelessness, Recreation, Culture, Transit, Climate Change and so much more... we have rolled up our sleeves to responsibly fund and undertake projects and initiatives that ensure *Windsor Works* for everyone.

And it is paying off.

But don't just take my word for it.

Three weeks ago, the Conference Board of Canada released their report on the 24 largest municipalities across the Nation. Windsor was the top city in their review as having the *brightest economic indicators* of all two-dozen communities studied.

Let's pause there for a moment.

**Windsor came out on top. Across the entire country!**

From manufacturing, to the industrial sector, to construction and real estate – our community is seeing the best economic indicators of any in the nation.

*Our time is now* to capture this moment to cement our City's economic prosperity. This will require us to be bold, ambitious, forward-thinking and to focus on *that* vision – more than ever before – of that Great City we all dreamed-up together.

You've all heard the now-famous quote from Peter Druker who said, *“the best way to predict the future is to create it.”*

And when I hear that quote I think of past community builders who did just that.

More than 165 years ago, Hiram Walker was attracted to the Canadian-side of the Detroit River, where he dreamed of building a distillery business. We all know the history and success of Walkerville, and how it was due in large measure to the community that Hiram built around his business enterprise.

You see, to support his growing distillery, Hiram needed to think bigger than the main goal that was in front of him. He had something special, something unique, and he needed to make it soar... make it grow... make it matter... make it *known*.

He needed to create an entire community that allowed for growth, and that had something equally special to offer. He built residential units for his workers, and schools for their children. He created a police force and fire brigade, he paid for the streets, sewers and streetlights and he even established hydroelectric utilities to power all of this activity and growth.

And due to the attractive nature of these developments, an up and coming car builder named Henry Ford was enticed to build the first Canadian automotive plant along the waterfront.

At the time, Hiram Walker was doing what he felt he needed to do to support his own economic activity. What he did, however, is create the most prized commodity when it comes to investment attraction: serviced industrial land, and the promise of a future filled with success, prosperity and – equally important – *possibility*.

Opportunities often stem from adversity... with success being measured, in part, by how well we both seize opportunities, *and* prepare for the unimaginable.

All of us here today know the difficult times that our region went-through as the last recession put our automotive sector - the foundation of our local economy - at risk.

16% unemployment and the prospect of our largest employer going bankrupt kept us spinning through many sleepless nights. The same type of sleepless nights many of our parents - my own included, felt in 1979 as we waited for news on whether Lee Iacocca could make a deal with President Jimmy Carter to save Chrysler Corporation – and the thousands of local jobs that hung in the balance.

Most of you know that before I was elected Mayor, I spent 8 years on City Council. During that time we laid the foundation for Windsor to be an attractive place for investment – being fiscally prudent – building amenities – and setting the stage for Windsor’s evolution to where we are today.

Both my predecessor and myself, and our Council’s have spent 20 years getting the “*Windsor House*” in order and preparing it for success. And as Mayor, I have stood before rooms like this, filled with astute and informed people just like you, and voiced my concerns about what would happen to Windsor, if our largest employer found their success somewhere outside of this community.

Flash forward to now. To the last few years. The last decade even. To *our* time as the community-builders entrusted to lead Windsor’s transition into the Great City it is meant to be.

Today we are on a much different economic footing.

Remember how I mentioned that Hiram created serviced industrialized land – which was, and still is, the most prized commodity when it comes to investment attraction?

Well, we know that Windsor landed the EV battery plant because we had readily available, serviced industrial land on offer.

The plant currently under construction represents a \$5-billion investment with more than 3,000 jobs coming online over the next few years. This plant represents the largest investment in Canada's auto industry, and one of the largest investments in Windsor in a century. And it happened, in part, because of our Council-endorsed *Windsor Works* strategy, and through the support of upper-levels of government with whom we had developed strong bonds for the benefit of this entire region.

With it, come several opportunities, as supply chains pivot to support NextStar Energy here in Windsor and the Volkswagen plant in St. Thomas... as well as the three EV battery plants being constructed just across the border in the United States.

With the support of City Council, there isn't an opportunity, anywhere, that I and our economic development team won't pursue to give Windsor the advantage to build this supply chain and attract more investment and create good-paying jobs.

**But time is of the essence.**

We have already secured the future for thousands more local workers, and solidified Windsor's strategic location as the Automobility Capital of Canada. As the world pivots to EVs, Windsor will be home to *the* facility that powers it all. With the NextStar Energy facility under construction, we must now turn our attention to creating similar conditions for future investment.

In Ontario today, we know there is an extreme shortage of serviced industrial land and that puts our region at a significant disadvantage when it comes to attracting new job-creating industries.

Business decisions simply can't wait years for communities to pull things together. To prepare for future investment opportunities, we need to *begin today* to prepare the lands and servicing to support the possibilities that are out there, some of which we know about and others we don't.

**Windsor's economic future depends on us – today – taking the steps to secure tomorrow's jobs and growth.**

For many, the solution that I propose will not come as a surprise. I've been talking about it for months and I made this a pillar of my campaign last fall.

**We need to service the Sandwich South lands to prepare for the growth and development that is coming.**

Take a look at any map of the region and this solution becomes plainly obvious.

Sandwich South is the land south of Windsor's International Airport and will soon host our regional acute care hospital. Thousands of homes are already planned for this area and the 401 to the south provides perfect access to Ontario's main economic corridor.

Equally important is construction of the new Gordie Howe Bridge. For many years people have said to me, 'You guys are so lucky to have Canada's largest infrastructure project being built in your backyard.' And they are right. This \$6-billion bridge is already transforming the local landscape, and while it's being constructed we are benefiting in a material way from all of the employment related to construction.

But ask yourself one question.....when it's done – how will Windsor benefit?

A truck driver will be able to drive from Montreal to Tijuana without stopping – except for fuel, rest and to check-in with Customs.

**Ladies and Gentlemen, the only luck we are going to have is the luck we're prepared to create.**

That is why we need to turn our attention to our location using our geography and current developments to our advantage - and create the luck we know is within reach.

The luck that will benefit our region by having the closest and largest industrial park on the Canadian side of the US-Canada border.

Last month, I spent several days in Toronto with Premier Ford and senior members of his Cabinet to ensure they understood and truly appreciated the potential that we have, right here in Windsor.

I needed to ensure they understood the key to unlocking this potential is direct access to the 401 via a new interchange connecting with an extended Lauzon Parkway.

I did this so they understood where Windsor most needs support to excel and expand. And to ensure they recognized that *our* success will be *their* success.

Building out this infrastructure will be a significant investment by both governments, and we have presented our case for why the investment makes sense, and why it must happen quickly and efficiently.

Premier Ford understands the ask. He knows we are creating more jobs, more housing, and that we need the infrastructure in place to support this exponential growth. The Premier and his entire team have been excellent partners to work with and I cannot speak more highly about the support and cooperation they have shown to advance our collective interests.



So, the question becomes **why here? Why this Sandwich South area for development?** It's costly. Some consider it sprawl. So what are we doing, and why?

I don't shy away from those questions because just like our government partners, we need our residents – the individuals and families and business owners and employees – we need everyone to understand where we're going and why, so that everyone can confidently join us on this journey – as the future success of our city depends on it.

**Will this be expensive?** Yes, it will be a significant commitment to build out this vision, to service these lands and create the conditions for future economic growth. But we cannot let fear of up-front costs threaten our economic future. The up-front investment will position these lands for accelerated growth, which then creates property tax streams in perpetuity that will benefit generations to come.

**Is this worth it?** Yes, because make no mistake, if we hadn't had the Twin Oaks properties available when LG came calling, they would not have waited for us to run roads or pipes to that site. They had to make a business decision in the moment – and every single one of you here sees the speed at which they are building their factory. We need to be ready to operate at the speed of business. If we aren't, they will simply go elsewhere.

**Is this 'sprawl'?** No. If you think building south of the airport is considered 'sprawl', then take a look at the map of Essex County. At the end of the day folks, this land is all within the City of Windsor's boundary and was annexed from the Town of Tecumseh in 2003 for the express purpose of allowing for future city growth and development.

We are not alone in experiencing growth. Lasalle, Tecumseh and Lakeshore have built-up around Windsor to accommodate the needs of our growing region. Now... there is almost no spare land left available between our communities from West to East.

If we do not build-out this area, then further job-related growth and development will simply continue outside of the city limits – and most concerningly, across the border in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky.

Given the amount of growth anticipated in our region over the next few years, we will likely see continued intensification east and west as well as south of our borders.

### **We all need to get ready!**

The Province of Ontario has set a target of 13,000 new residential units to be built in Windsor over the next nine years. While some of this can be done through strategic infill and densification within areas of the City, we know that the detached home is still the product of choice. For any meaningful subdivision expansion, and frankly, any serious scenario where we can meet this goal, we have to be thinking of the land south of Windsor Airport.

This is our time to lay the groundwork to ensure we attract the investment, create the well-paying jobs, build the homes for our families and create our own destiny.

The **Sandwich South Servicing Plan** has been part of dozens of community consultations to date, and includes space for industrial, residential, commercial and institutional development. **While a little more work needs to be done, we have a vision and are working on the plan, and with the Province of Ontario, we will have a partnership.**

### **The conditions are now right to build our potential.**

This is about capturing the future and laying the foundation for our economic success. For jobs and growth through 2040 and beyond.

Our community is at a critical juncture – and the choice before us is really simple: we can build-out, and attract new industries to our region.

We can build our Great City.

Or we can savour today's success, sit back and relax, thinking we are set...and leave the problem to our kids.

Some may say we're trying to build a field of dreams – “if you build it they will come.”

One thing I know for sure, if we don't build it, they will never come – and they WILL go elsewhere – and by elsewhere I mean outside of Essex County. And with them, the jobs go too. And that my friends, is a risk too big to take.

Together, we can build our Great City.

I know those of you in this room... your shared commitments to the opportunities we have here, right here and right now, today. I know you know we did not get here because of luck.

Our economic action plan, *Windsor Works* called for a strong commitment and focus on landing an EV battery plant. It was a central recommendation adopted and funded by City Council.

And then we went to work to land the opportunity.

There was no luck in the City of Windsor acquiring hundreds of acres of land and leasing it to NextStar.

There was no luck in having a pre-approved Community Improvement Plan that allowed for tax-incremental financing for NextStar.

And there was no luck in funding municipal capital improvements that supported NextStar to undertake works to meet their aggressive deadlines.

**All of these things that helped land the NextStar deal were a function of us creating the luck we hoped to have.** And that’s exactly what we did – and it’s exactly what I want for us to continue to do.

As I stood at the warehouse waiting for the battery factory announcement event to start last year, one of the most senior leaders at Stellantis came up to me and introduced himself. I had never met him before. And he said to me, “You know, the federal and provincial commitments are fairly common in every country in North America – what you need to know is that but for your City’s contribution and commitment to move fast, this deal would have gone somewhere else.”

And I’ve been on the receiving end of enough economic development conversations where people are handing me their offers from Michigan and Ohio to know this to be true... some of you in this room have handed me those offers and you too, know this to be true.

In the near future, City Council will need to consider and debate these growth plans. And we’ll need to make some big decisions.

There’s going to be a lot of ground to cover.

But I know that if we keep our eye on the objective, we will accomplish great things for our City and region.

And I know this because we have an opportunity today that we simply cannot let pass us by.

Ladies and Gentlemen, what we have in front of us is a generational opportunity.

The worst decision we could make is to do nothing at all.

Because we know how to *Invest in Windsor* even when times are particularly challenging.

Council passed the City of Windsor’s 2023 Municipal Budget just a few weeks ago. In the macro-economic environment that we find ourselves, this budget is prudent and responsible, while investing in the services and amenities that Windsor residents expect and deserve.

In a time when everything costs more and we’re aiming to deliver the same services, we delivered an overall budget increase much lower than the rate of inflation. **That is significant.**

We are continuing, through this budget, to make strategic investments to improve quality of life for residents, fix roads, enhance parks, build affordable housing, and build-up the infrastructure that will be needed to build our Great City. **That is significant.**

### **So what is this Great City that we’re talking about here and now?**

Through partnership and a willingness to collaborate on the bigger picture, Windsor, and the surrounding region, is at the threshold of major projects and initiatives that will forever change our community – its landscape, its story, and its economic trajectory.

We’ve worked in lockstep with the Province of Ontario to secure our new **regional acute care hospital**. The Ministry of Health will receive a detailed plan and updated costing estimates for the new hospital in short-order.

The **Gordie Howe International Bridge** is taking shape every day before our eyes, and is on track to open in 2025. It will be a tool to ensure the free-flow and growth of trade between Canada and the United States. It will also be a marvel of engineering and a thing of beauty that will forever change the shared skyline between Windsor and Detroit.

Every week, we inch closer to the creation of the **Ojibway National Urban Park**, in partnership with the federal and provincial governments and with Parks Canada.

Residents in Windsor-Essex have long known that Ojibway is a precious area – rich in culture and heritage, and boasting a unique ecosystem. Just imagine a national park within our city limits.

Since this land was acquired in the 1950's by the City of Windsor before it was even part of our municipal boundary, we've been strong stewards of protecting this natural heritage for future generations. The implications on tourism, ecotourism, culture and heritage is significant with this item, folks. And our new City bird, is part of a larger effort to bring even more tourism to our region than the 40,000+ people who visit us annually searching for their favourite birds.

Truly, this has the potential to become Windsor's very own unique and incredible version of Banff National Park... and I know you may chuckle at that statement, but just you wait and see!

We remain focused on the revitalization of **Downtown Windsor**, with major investments. We are also continuing our strong partnerships with the University of Windsor and St. Clair College. The university is preparing to launch its Innovation Space at 300 Ouellette, and St. Clair is fitting out new classroom space at CityCentre. We continue to see new businesses, restaurants and entrepreneurs set up shop in the core, even as we continue to explore next steps for a new main public library branch, Civic Esplanade enhancements, and so much more.

This does not mean that we are blind to the issues facing our downtown. They are challenges faced by communities all across Canada. That's why City Council has endorsed and is funding our *10-Year Housing and Homelessness Master Plan*, and why we have been actively implementing strategies and initiatives by working with upper levels of government to advocate for additional resources and supports.

Make no mistake, we want to help people battling mental-health and addiction issues but we aren't going to let the negative behaviours often associated with people suffering with those conditions take-over our city.

We are working with the Windsor Police Service and other security experts on a solution that would allow us to implement a real-time crime centre similar to that found in the City of Detroit where cameras installed on private property are monitored in real-time with the consent of property owners. This will allow police resources to be used efficiently and effectively while acting as a deterrent to those contemplating criminal activity. This type of system is also scalable to provide coverage elsewhere across the City where issues exist.

Beginning with Walkerville, we are investing in creating districts that revitalize and reinforce areas of historic and cultural significance to create spaces that are unique, packed with amenities, and become points of interest for residents and visitors alike, while also telling the stories that make Windsor truly special.

Our investments are intended to spark private sector investments thereby providing an economic generating multiple-factor of overall investment into an area.

And Walkerville is just the start!

We're also investing in parks and playgrounds, expanding multi-use trails, updating recreation facilities, expanding public art, increasing accessibility, and adding routes and service enhancements to the public transit system to ensure people can get where they need to go, when they need to get there.

Friends, we are a City on the move, with the wind at our backs, and every investment we make today is about ensuring that no one – no resident and no neighbourhood – is left behind as we grow.

Windsorites in 2040 will look back at this moment, this point in time, and – when done right – they will salute our collective vision and boldness.

Success will be measured in years and not months. It will require our community to stand-united in this vision with determination and persistence.

To dream and wish. To plan and strategize.

To design and move forward. To build and strengthen.

To seize the moment and the day.

To leave timid half-steps behind, and go all in, just like we did with NextStar.

To capture the future by reaching out and grabbing it with confidence and determination.

**The future in front of us is NOT too good to be true** – it's real and it's waiting for us to act.

Author and speaker Orrin Woodward once said, "**Never settle for good when great is available.**"

When Hiram Walker died in 1899, he had created a great brand of whisky and a great distillery – that endures to this day, 165 years after it began.

He laid the foundation for a great town – bearing his name – whose superior finances were the envy of Ontario during and after the Great Depression.

His vision for building services for residents and his business led two great visionaries, Henry Ford and Gordon McGregor to build the first automotive plant in Canada directly adjacent to the distillery and bearing another great name – *Ford Motor Company*, that laid the path to us becoming the Automotive Capital of Canada.



And I wonder today, if Hiram Walker – all 5 feet of him walked through those doors and looked at all our community has done....all we've been through, the trials, the tribulations, the peaks and the valleys, the growth, the change, the opportunity and the vision.....what would he say?

You need not be a student of Hiram-Walker-history to know he would tell us all to continue making this place great.

So let's pull a Hiram Walker, and create together something bigger than any one of us.

Let's seize the opportunity in front of us today – the likes of which we haven't seen in a generation.

And let's make sure we capture our future by making the right economic investments today!

You know, the birthplace of our city was Old Sandwich Town founded in 1797... since that time the ***River and the Land have sustained us*** through so much.

So has the grit and determination of countless generations of people and newcomers who call our community home.

And from *Old Sandwich Town* as the start of our growth, to *Sandwich South* as the area that will allow us to continue to prosper – let's make sure, together, our families, friends, and neighbours can continue to call this great city home with the same pride, hope and optimism that we all have for her today.

Thank you for being here, and for all we're about to accomplish together.

*-Windsor Mayor Drew Dilkens*