



2017 State of the City Address

Common Ground

Welcome to my 7th State of the City Address. I thank all of you for coming out and showing such an interest in your community.

- Introduce Councillors and senior management
- Introduce other levels of government

Over the years, this speech has focused on variations of the theme, “Buildings Up and Taxes Down”. But this year, I want to talk about projects that merge the past with the future and highlight the virtues that make it all possible.

This year, it is Canada’s 150th Birthday, and I think a little historical context is important. Pierre Burton wrote a great book about settling the Prairies, called *The Promised Land*. The prologue is called “Professor Oleskow’s Vision”, and the large plaque in the courtyard at City Hall describes how he came to Western Canada in 1895 and became enchanted by the New World. According to Burton, he noted, “There are no Lords, no peasants; here, everyone is a master! Officials are not officious; they are workers just like everybody else, without special privileges. Their offices operate just like stores. You can walk in without bowing, and the man behind the desk – even a Cabinet Minister – will probably keep his hat on.” He noted that the few settlements existing at the time were lost in the great sweep of the plains. He described “wave after wave of grassland rolling west toward the foothills, the earth is everywhere rich and black.” Burton says that Oleskow and the settlers that followed were in search for Utopia, for a Promised Land, and he described the Great Migration of settlers that followed as “a phenomenon rare, if not unique, in history; the filling up of an empty realm, a thousand miles broad, with more than one million people in less than one generation.” We are the beneficiaries of Professor Oleskow’s vision.

We have inherited the Promised Land. It is ours now. The horse-drawn plows are gone, and it is a New World with social disparities and E-commerce, and man-made climate change. *New York Times* journalist Tom Friedman talks about the New World in his latest book, *Thank-you for Being Late*. He talks about how technological change speeds up every year. He mentions Moore’s Law, which predicted that computing power would double every two years, and it has done so for 50 years.

He writes about people wanting to be “respected, connected, and protected”, and calls on leaders to create communities that foster education and connectedness and to focus on the future by embracing new technological innovation.

As stewards of this emerging world, our Council has pursued post-secondary education by offering Brandon University's "University One", and by finally getting an ACC commitment to a permanent LPN Program. We have promoted urban renewal. We have encouraged housing. And we are very proud to have assembled the land and provided a significant grant so that the regional Mental Health Association could build the second ECHO apartment block. By the time our mandate ends, we hope to have renewed every park in the community. And we hope our energy and lighting programs will be a beacon for surrounding communities.

But we could not do it without all of you – the Rotary Club, the Chamber, and all the individuals and groups that make our committee more connected and more appealing every day. As Tony Castro says in the intro song, "Common Ground", "everybody's just looking for something/I'm a lot like you, you're a lot like me/we've got to stand together on common ground/we've got to band together/or we all fall down."

Our common ground needs a solid foundation. I am very pleased that, once again in 2016, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Manitoba Division, noted Dauphin is the best managed rural city in the province.

You can clearly see the trend. Our taxes are down, our reserves are up, our banking interest earned has been quite significant, up by \$150,000 per year, and our debt is almost completely paid off. All that remains is about a \$3,000 per year payment for a road upgrade made some years ago in the Industrial Park. Essentially debt-free!!! The debentures paid off in 2016 related to City Hall and the CN Station, so that now they are both mortgage-free.

This means that the beautiful and iconic CN Station across the street is owned debt-free by the citizens of Dauphin. Besides providing a home for the Rail Museum, the station building earns \$125,000 net rent per annum, which was enough to pay the debenture, and which money can now be freed up for other purposes. As the tenants essentially paid for the building, it was essentially free for the taxpayer of Dauphin. Not only was the train station free, but when Fisheries moved out Mr. Collett got about \$40,000 worth of furniture from them for a pittance as well.

I have been asked why it is that the City of Dauphin does not have to raise taxes, and I think that the PowerPoint we went through helps us to understand that, but when you throw in the odd free office building it makes it all crystal clear.

People love free stuff, and our Council and staff are pretty good at getting senior levels of government and everyone in the community involved in improving our facilities.

They do it in several ways. Most municipalities spend a great deal of money on consultants. In our case, the Public Utilities Board water rate application – FREE; ACAP airport funding request to the federal government – FREE; overhauling all of our zoning rules – FREE. All done internally. In fact, the City of Brandon has eight people doing Human Resources, and in

our case the job is divided between Mr. Collett and Ms. Griffiths. The City of Portage has three IT people, and in our case Mr. Brenner does it all with a little help from time to time from Baker Computers. And here is a list of all the other projects, all built with operating funds, or grants, or generous donations:

- Vermillion Park washroom and showers
- Dog Park
- Ballpark concession building
- Recycling bins
- Two EcoConnexions grants from CN

Our very generous public has done its part as well, especially the Rotary Club – the Splash Park and playground, the Skate Park, the waterslide, the Vermillion Park pavilion, significant contributions to the Vermillion bridge, and the “Curiosity” statue.

The waterslide is a great example of a community working together. We once had a DRS manager who said it was going to be \$400,000 to replace the slide. Terry Payne found one for \$250,000 and started collecting donations. Individuals gave over \$10,000; the vet clinic gave \$7,500, the Foundation \$5,000, Credit Union \$20,000, Kinsmen \$7,800, Rotary Club \$50,000. Community Places granted \$27,000, and Ryan organized a Canada 150 Grant for \$110,000, and it is all paid for! It went from \$400,000 to FREE!

If staff can't get it free, they work very hard to make sure that the cost is as reasonable as possible.

- Our ladder truck was supposed to cost \$1.1 million in 2007, and the one we got actually cost city taxpayers about \$110,000;
- The Fire Department's water tanker was a similar story. The City paid about \$100,000 rather than the initial estimate of \$250,000;
- The train station shelter was half paid for by the Province, as was last year's bell tower renovations here at the Art Centre, and we are applying again this year for further remedial work.

My favourite story about the City staff making dollars go further has to do with the bulldozer at the Landfill. The request for a new one for about \$400,000 came from Public Works to City Hall about five years ago, but our Director of Finance insisted that they put a new undercarriage on the current one and get all the mileage out of it that they could. Last year, the engine started to go, and this time a new one was finally ordered, and the supplier even agreed to give us a \$20,000 credit on the old one. By the time the new one showed up, the old one really was on its last legs, and our operator drove it up onto the lowbed where the motor finally quit. They not only got the last mileage, they got the last footage! I have no idea how they got it off the lowbed, but they still gave us the \$20,000.

The entire community knows that we live on common ground, that we are in it together and have worked together to pick up the costs of public amenities so that they are not paid for by taxpayers. That same spirit is everywhere in Dauphin, and it drives the participants in the annual Cancer Walk up at the Selo site. Survivors, and family, and friends walk around and around for hours, supporting each other and raising money, and when dusk comes they light luminaires. As my grandmother used to say, “It’s better to light one candle than to sit and curse the darkness.”

Our downtown is common ground to all of us, and over the last two years Council has focused on working with Hydro to replace lighting fixtures and paint the poles black and added some free garbage and recycling containers, bike stands, and benches. This year, we are installing more benches and bike racks and replacing our bump-out parks and adding street banners on 1st Avenue NW, and we are remodeling and renovating the CN underpass. We have provided money for night lighting here at the Art Centre. We are planting at least 100 new trees and are inviting the Communities in Bloom judges back to judge again after a couple of years off. We purchased more ground – several acres of property between the Round House and the Museum and are planning to redevelop that property and are planning a formal parking lot for the Museum at long last. A complete makeover of CN Park is underway, and Dauphin’s birthday is July 11th, so mark your calendar for our big Dauphin and Canada birthday party that day in the park.

Because our downtown and independent merchants are important, today I am announcing that the City is rolling out an incentive program for storefront renewal in the downtown area, wherein approved applications will receive matching dollars of up to \$5,000. In 2017, we look forward to new public and private money being invested to do a whole neighbourhood makeover.

But we do not just want to renovate what is here; we want to embrace the future head-on. Henry David Thoreau once said that the best way to predict the future was to invent it. We can do that by being at the forefront of changing our energy footprint. In doing so, we will reduce our costs, just like we reduced our banking, interest payments, and garbage collection costs, but it is something more than that.

I began by noting that after the treaties with the First Nations were negotiated, our forefathers inherited Treaty 2 territory, a wide open plain, untilled and unsettled since the last glaciers melted away from the land. Climate change will alter that landscape in ways that we cannot imagine, and if we are to be proper stewards of that plain, then we must do what we can to encourage the reduction of energy consumption. I have friends who say that, as Canadians, we only contribute 1.5% of the global carbon output, but on a per capita basis it is one of the highest in the world.

I lobbied Stan Struthers when he was Hydro Minister for some time to get Hydro to make Dauphin a model community and let us demonstrate how energy reduction and energy substitution could become real if given a chance. We have a solid portfolio of environmental projects lined up for 2017, and some have already been announced, like the approximately 1 kilometre of sidewalks that I noted earlier, the trees being planted through the CN EcoConnexions, and the success of our recycling and waterline leak detection efforts.

The first tangible result of our agreement with Hydro was that last year we were very fortunate that they agreed to hire an Energy Advocate for the community. Steve Sobering started in that position last summer, and the results have been amazing. Over 200 businesses have signed up for lighting upgrades with both the lights and the installation being provided free by Hydro. Steve has worked with businesses and housing owners in order to secure insulation grants as well. With the assistance of Steve's hard work and enthusiasm, we are proud to announce the following energy projects for 2017:

1. A 50-kilowatt solar project to be installed at Lift Station #1 on the north edge of the city;
2. LED light upgrades at City facilities now finished;
3. Construction of a Net Zero energy house in partnership with the Credit Union, Co-op, and ACC;
4. The completion of plans for a geothermal project for the Water Treatment Plant;
5. Plans for installation of an inline power generating turbine at the Booster Station by the airport;
6. HVAC upgrades to City Hall;
7. A further 50-kilowatt solar project either at the City Shop, Landfill, or some other location, all of which will prove to Hydro and our community that we are energy reduction leaders.

City Public Works is doing its part to green our community as well, as we roll out the curbside yard waste program and a new provincially licensed compost site at the Landfill.

Our forefathers had to constantly innovate since this land was settled, and we are proud to keep faith with that tradition. We also want to acknowledge the characteristics that brought us this far in Canada's 150-year journey, with the installation of a series of statues reminding us, and all those that follow, of those virtues that we must retain regardless of how the world changes.

Our first was a young Ukrainian couple just off the train, demonstrating the optimism of the early pioneers. Then the curiosity of young children about the world around them, placed at the library. St. Paul's Home features the compassion of the sisters who selflessly served community members in need. The perseverance of the pioneer women who worked hard every day to provide bread for their families is commemorated by the monument placed at

City Hall. This year, we will install a statue of Billy Barker on the 100th Anniversary of his becoming a fighter pilot in the First World War and recognizing his courage in becoming the most decorated airman in the history of the Commonwealth. Then we will feature the vision of the first pioneer farm families who came from Gladstone with horses and wagons in order to till the earth and claim their piece of the Promised Land with the first farmer statue to be placed in Pioneer Park.

These statues will be here to bear witness to countless Canadian anniversaries in the future situated in a beautiful, environmentally sustainable, inclusive community. Tom Friedman concludes his book about our collective future after traveling the world by coming home to a suburb in North Minneapolis that had been built on virgin soil in his youth, and noting that the trees had grown tall, and thick, and full of leaves since then. He says, "Those trees and I had both grown up and out from the same topsoil, and the most important personal, political, and philosophical lesson I took from the journey that is this book is that the more the world demands that we branch out, the more we each need to be anchored in a topsoil of trust that is the foundation of all healthy communities. We must be enriched by that topsoil, and we must enrich it in turn." I am so proud that the citizens of our community stand together, recognize that they live on common ground, our Promised Land, in the great sweep of the western plains, and every day we call on our compassion, and curiosity, and perseverance to enrich a community that is prepared to embrace the future. All of you have played a big part in this. I think you are exceptional, and I think that together we are creating a healthy community, the best community, in the greatest country in the world.