

Mayor Horn's State of the City Speech
Dec. 11, 2024
Mission Regional Chamber of Commerce Christmas Luncheon

As always, I want to express my gratitude for the Mission Chamber of Commerce and all the work they do to represent business in our community, culminating every year with this wonderful tradition. Thank you also to the sponsors who made today possible and for always giving back.

I want to welcome our new MLA, Reann Gasper, and my colleagues on Council. I would also like to recognize our partners from the Board of Education, First Nations leadership, and the Freedom of the City recipients here today.

I would like to begin by expressing gratitude for the opportunity to be with all of you on the shared territories of the Stó:lō people. Today I am going to focus on the concept of sharing with our neighbors, including those who will make this land their home over the next seven generations.

In his book, *Stumbling on Happiness*, author Daniel Gilbert says that we are universally terrible at two things. First, we are exceptionally bad at predicting the future because we deceive ourselves into believing that the past is a pattern that will continue forever. Second, we are terrible at predicting what will make us happy.

To prove my point, I know that many of you predicted that this year's speech would be all about Christmas memories and traditions, but I am going to do something different. This year's speech will not be about Christmas, but about another observance we celebrate during the holiday season, the New Year. Today I would like to celebrate and reflect on the simple gift of later.

Over the past year, I've lost my mom and helped my dad transition into long-term care after many battles with his health. And like many of you, I have lost friends and family members prematurely in the last few years. We all know that these passages will come in our lives, but when they do, they are very potent reminders that we have limited time with which to truly live.

In your life, how often do you rely on later? I'll get to that tomorrow. That will have to wait. I'll put that on my list of things to do. Every single one of us hopes and plans based on the idea that the future will give us opportunities. In truth, many of us are not doing much to make the future fertile for ourselves or our neighbors. In fact, I am starting to believe that when we consider the future, the thing we feel the most is fear.

When I was a child, the future was viewed with great hope. When you watched television programs such as Star Trek, Buck Rogers in the 25th Century, and even The Jetsons, you saw something that went beyond the obvious advances in technology and space travel. In those old programs, we envisioned advanced societies where we accomplished greatness by setting aside petty boundaries. We imagined entire planetary systems working together. Interracial romances were no big deal. And technology looked like Dr. Theopolis, Kitt Car and Rosey the Robot, providing sage wisdom and dutiful assistance.

Somewhere along the line, we have begun to imagine Mad Max when we think about the future. We worry that we will not have enough to share and that we will have to take to our four-wheelers to fight for our share of the gasoline, water, toilet paper and Taylor Swift tickets.

I think there are three reasons why this has happened to us.

First, we have lost our sense of what makes us truly happy.

Pause for a moment and think about 5 new things in your lives, then put them into one of two columns, the "good stuff" and the "bad stuff." Under good stuff, most people will put things like the birth of a grandchild, a new job, or seeing your child graduate. But, when you look at these things more carefully, you'll see that they all come with a huge side dish of adversity. Grandkids means dirty diapers and giving up Sunday football for Paw Patrol; new jobs come with discomfort and risk; and your graduating kids are going to leave home soon, meaning that you're going to have to relearn how to talk with your spouse.

Now think about the bad stuff, like losing a family member, downsizing your home, or sending your kids off to university. Not only do these things come with some upside, but research shows we almost always get past the adversity and end up counting the bad stuff as being unexpectedly good. Losing family members can make us more mindful of the time we have with loved ones and more focused on our own health. Downsizing makes us feel light and free. No kids at home means fewer battles for the bathroom and more smoochy time with your partner.

We fight so hard to avoid the bad stuff, but it turns out that it's our frame of reference that matters. When we are grateful and reflective, it's all good stuff.

Second, we have stopped trusting one another and we have become fearful of anyone we have yet to meet.

Somewhere along the line, the concept of "stranger danger" has begun to run our lives. Rather than seeing our neighbours as fellow explorers - as helpers in our newest challenges - we have begun to fear them. We like to blame this on social media, politics, and biased news outlets, but I think Mission's view of newcomers really started to skew when we began battling over the Silverdale-Genstar lands about 20 years ago.

I cannot help but realize I was one of the voices who first fell into the trap of thinking that we would be better off if change would only just leave us alone. I understand feeling apprehensive about change, but I now know that I was mistaken when I believed that a small-town lifestyle was based on geography, rather than sociology. A beautiful piece of property means nothing if you don't feel connected to your neighbours.

When I was 5 years old, my neighbour, Frank Desmond, saw me running around with a piece of paper tied to a string. I was too young to understand what made a kite fly, but Mr. Desmond took it upon himself to show me how to make a kite out of newspaper, string, and scraps of wood, and then he had his son Jimmy take me down to the park to fly it. Later, after moving away from Mission and then returning, Mr. and Mrs. Desmond decided to trust Tracy and I with the house they had hand built on their family's land. Because of that trust, we were able to afford a home in Silverdale, right across the street from my father. I was once the newcomer, but when Mr. Desmond saw that little boy out his window, he saw a new neighbour, not a stranger. These days, when I look out that exact same window, I see all of you all that same way.

We need new neighbours here. They will go on to be the Mr. Desmonds of our community, and Mission's next builders. They will be our new teachers, coaches, business owners, volunteers, fundraisers, doctors, nurses, and firefighters. They will be just like you, leaders who navigate us through future chapters of prosperity and adversity.

Finally, we have lost our sense of adventure.

There was a time here and across this entire continent when change was not only expected; it was fervently pursued. The best place to go was to where others had yet to tread, from the tallest mountain to the fastest of waters. Our society depended on innovation and boldness, but now we seem worried to go first or even to replicate the successes of our neighbours. We seem to be suffering from an acute case of Tall Poppy Syndrome, worried that we will lose the good parts of

ourselves as we try new things. Wayne Gretzky famously said that "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take," but I sometimes think we are too worried about losing our parking spot to even go into the rink.

When your Council thinks about the future, we aren't thinking about how to keep Mission exactly as it is. Of course, like you, we value the essence of this community and want to make sure it survives, but that is the entire community's work. It cannot be accomplished by government without your help. That spirit of neighbourliness, that feeling of living in a small town, has survived through world wars, economic crises, natural disasters, and dramatic population growth. So long as we hold that ethos in all our hearts, it will thrive in Mission, but it will only do so if we have an economically, socially, and environmentally vibrant community in which it can be held.

Council's work means setting up Mission for the next series of challenges coming our way, and that means ensuring a community where everybody feels that they have access to a good quality of life. If there is any perception of scarcity or inequity, history tells us that conflict and anger will not be far behind.

We know that our community is concerned with safety and security, so we are actively planning for the construction of a fire hall in Cedar Valley and have secured the property for that building. We are recruiting new firefighters for that fire station, adding two in 2023 and a new Assistant Chief (in charge of training) this year. We have expanded our RCMP complement, adding one new locally funded member and two provincial officers. We have adopted Police, Fire and Human Resource Master Plans that will see us increase our safety personnel and vital City staff incrementally over the next five years.

We have also dedicated resources to more strategic provincial and federal advocacy, urging other branches of government to help us address growth. We're working closely with the Board of Education to support their advocacy, with a priority on new elementary schools in Mission now that the High School is coming.

Similarly, in partnership with north Fraser municipalities, electoral areas, and First Nations, we are working with the medical community and the Fraser Valley Regional Hospital District to advocate for expanded healthcare services in Mission. We are not only focused on Mission Memorial Hospital but are working to ensure that a range of healthcare services is provided here, including mental health, long-term care, diagnostics, and accessible family medicine.

We recognize that you are often frustrated when you encounter the healthcare system, and that your experience is aggravated by having to travel outside Mission to receive care. That's why we have persistently lobbied Fraser Health to give citizens, helping agencies, and medical providers a voice in the planning of the Mission Memorial Hospital site and the surrounding neighborhood. It has been a tiresome process, but we will not give up.

To accelerate the development of healthcare services, Council has designated the area around Mission Memorial as a neighbourhood planning area for a healthcare district. We want that neighbourhood enriched with an expanded array of services, including congregate care, clinics, and specialist offices. We are even exploring options for healthcare worker housing. We will look to you for insight in the planning of that neighborhood, and, we hope, investment in making it happen.

An improved dyke is also a priority. Extending our dyke is not just a matter of public safety; it is a critical ingredient in the revitalization of the waterfront, so we are working with the Province to design the eastern leg of the dyke, and we have already begun the process of investigating grants to help us build that infrastructure once planning is complete.

It is the area of economic development where I am most proud of our Council's work. This year we officially inaugurated our municipal development corporation, Mission Bridgehead Investment Corporation, and selected our first board and CEO. We recently completed our draft strategic plan, and I was exhilarated by the vision and expertise in that room.

Bridgehead will be a catalyst for waterfront development and much more. It is a development company that you own, focusing on multiple bottom lines, including social, economic, environmental, and cultural returns. It was designed to be more agile than Council in partnering with other levels of government, the private sector, and First Nations in maximizing the benefit of the City's land holdings. Using our own internal expertise, we are moving toward an active, agile, and strategic approach for attracting investment, and we are confident that we will see the same sort of returns as Chilliwack and Surrey.

Our waterfront project was recognized and presented at an international level this year, bringing serious investment inquiries from Japan, the United States and Eastern Canada. I know that people have spoken about the waterfront for 40 years, and that many folks have taken, an "I'll believe it when I see it" view of things. I don't blame them, so rather than overpromise, I will simply say stay tuned.

Council recognizes the need for future business and employment space throughout the City, so we supported the Cade Barr Industrial Park, doubling the capacity provided by the Silver Creek Industrial Park. Similarly, we are exploring industrial opportunities in locations throughout Mission, such as at the foot of Wren Street, the Hatzic foreshore and exhausted gravel pits.

As we all know, housing affordability is a challenge across Canada. Mission is tackling the affordability crisis by rapidly building missing middle housing in the form of townhomes and condominiums. Through density bonusing, we are encouraging more affordable housing units and rental buildings. We have brought in legislation to protect people vulnerable to development in mobile home parks and will be bringing in a suite of new affordable housing policies early in 2025. And we are the only municipality in BC that found a way to offer amnesty for secondary suites.

We are, however, falling behind on supportive housing. While we are excited to see 50 units opened at Hurd Street, we still have a much higher need than we can currently meet. Working alongside agencies such as More Than a Roof, SARA For Women, Mission Community Services, Mission Association for

Seniors Housing, and BC Housing, our aim is to accelerate supportive housing for women, families, seniors, and youth over the next few years.

Working with Mission Association for Community Living and the province, we were able to break ground this fall on a new inclusive daycare for Cedar Valley, and we have supported several developments in the area that will help to create neighbourhood centres, introducing new retail and daycare spaces.

While our application for a Foundry Youth Centre was not successful, we have continued working with community partners to create our own, made-in- Mission option, I like to call The Forge. Social welfare remains a driving force for us, and we do not intend to slow down on that work over the next two years.

We are doing much more work than I can fully describe here, but I'll say that we are actively addressing other critical areas such as expanding our transit service; using new construction dollars to fund human resources growth; and improving our parks, culture, and recreation amenities.

The first two years of this term have flown by, and there is still much we need to do, but we need help from business.

First, we need your voice. We need to hear from you about the business value of the policies and budget choices we are considering. Incentives, density bonuses, business parks and development corporations rarely resonate with residential taxpayers, so if they are important to business, we need you to say so. Whether you are speaking through a business federation or on your own, we want to hear from you.

And we know that you are busy but would welcome you on one of our advisory committees. Or join the Chamber or another community organization and take an active role in letting us know how we can make Mission better.

Second, please be a constructive voice and an active helper in addressing our community's concerns.

We know that issues such as homelessness and shoplifting are challenges for your business. Keeping us informed is important, but you can do more by helping the agencies that are doing their part to address the underlying causes of these problems. Supporting agencies such as Mission Community Services, SARA For Women, Union Gospel Mission, Hope Central, Mission Community Skills Centre, St. Joseph's Food Bank, the Crime Prevention Office, Pleasantview Housing Society, and Mission Friendship Centre are all ways that you can help others and, in the process, help our community. A 10-minute phone call with a local agency will give you concrete ways to make a difference, and you may be surprised to hear that money isn't always what they need most. Leadership, expertise and volunteer hours are in very high demand, so please help by bringing your business acumen to the table.

Third, get informed. Recent budget decisions in areas such as tourism and film are understandably concerning for members of the business community, but they were rooted in sound planning and financial management. I had some conversations with people that began with anger about those decisions, rather than curiosity. You have my promise that you will be heard if you call, but please begin with a question. You may be surprised how the answers change your initial reaction.

If you have suggestions for how we can better inform you, please let us know. Council members regularly attend Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Business Association meetings. We took part in two business town halls this year, and we make time to visit individual businesses when we are invited.

Finally, and most important, please send out hope. In a world that is increasingly angry and fearful, we need to make sure that people understand that there is still a lot of “home” in our hometown. Despite our challenges, Mission remains a fantastic place to live, raise your children, enjoy the outdoors, and yes, to do business. And everyone in this room is working together to make things even better tomorrow.

This New Year's Eve, ask yourself how you can shape the world for the better in 2025.

Many of us have lost dear things in these last few years, but we have not lost everything. If we lose the ability to count our blessings and to hold hope, then we have lost everything.

We can be sad and still be hopeful. We can move forward with a sense of adventure and trust, rather than being stuck in anger, hate, and misery.

Remember, none of us will ever live a day without challenges. It is our work to turn our blessings against our adversities. Rather than passively hoping, it's up to us to plan, work and invest in the future.

It's a guarantee that some of the seeds we plant today will not grow as expected, but we have proven that we will adapt and reap the benefits of whatever grows. Our forebears sowed seeds for our future, and now it is time for us to do the same for the next generation.

A few days ago, my good friend Kristie let me know she had received some very difficult medical news. I want to dedicate my speech today to her, because she is facing her future bravely, placing trust in others for her care, and feeling grateful for every little bit of later she gets in her life.

Remember, today is the present but tomorrow is a gift.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.