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Standing by for the start of the Mayor's State of the City speech and event at the Guelph Delta. Follow along with the tweets.



LIVE BLOG: Mayor's State of the City for 2023

A lot has changed in the last 10 months since Mayor Cam Guthrie gave his last State of the City. There are a lot of challenges in front of us, but there's only one question we want answered g...

<https://guelphpolitico.ca/2023/02/02/live-blog-mayors-state-of-the-city-for-2023/>

If you were wondering about the last State of the City update, you can listen to it in this recent episode of the Politicast.



GUELPH POLITICAST #358 – The State of the City, A Year Ago

Every year, the Mayor of Guelph is invited to an event called the State of the City where he or she gives a speech to the members of the Chamber of Commerce about the current issues facing Guelph a...

<https://guelphpolitico.ca/2023/01/25/guelph-politicast-358-the-state-of-the-city-a-year-a...>

This year's program is getting underway with opening remarks from Chamber of Commerce CEO and President Shakiba Shayani.

Ryan Scott from Fusion Homes will introduce the mayor. He says they're exciting to work with the community to continue to build Guelph.



Mayor Guthrie has now taken the stage. He will start with some thank yous.

Guthrie gets a little joke in about the hullabaloo around Mike Schreiner by "checking his notes" about his present party affiliation.

Guthrie says it's his intention to take more questions from the floor this year. Some questions were handed in advanced, and Guthrie attests that he has not seen the questions in advanced.

Breaking news: Guthrie doesn't have a gimmick for this State of the City. He says he did on purpose because he needs everyone to listen to his words, his tone. He needs to be "straight up". There are no gimmicks for the seriousness.

We open with highlights from 2022. The City's in good financial shape: AAA credit rating, efficiencies found by City staff, provincial grants, et al.

Guthrie says there has been a cultural shift in City Hall, and that has been because council has empowered staff to find ways to do things better and more efficiently without going through all the red tape.

Guthrie says that this is what people should expect the government to do with their money, the money you "have to earn first before the government takes it."

Guthrie highlights underperforming assets: Selling District Energy to Cascara, giving the Farmers' Market to 10C to run, and giving 65 Delhi to Wellington for supportive housing.

Guthrie discusses the Municipal Accommodation Tax that the City hopes to fund tourism activities to the tune of \$700k-\$800k per year. He notes that the Chamber is a partner in this endeavour, as well as money in the budget for business incubation.

Impact on the city from U of G? \$2 billion, Guthrie notes as a "force we cannot ignore." He says partnerships are massive and are often a highlight for businesses looking to move to Guelph.

On Transit, Guthrie touts Kids-Ride-Free benefits, and the new affordable bus pass. He says these programs were such a success that they're not permanent as of last week's budget.

On the formation of Downtown Strategic Advisory Group last summer. He says that we need full policy change, and a lot of that needs to come from the ONgov. We are a caring community, and the public space is a public space for all...

...But the downtown should not be overrun "with behaviours that are unacceptable to the flourishing of our public spaces for businesses, visitors or anyone else visiting downtown."

Guthrie also touts the dip in the crime severity index, plus the approval of red light cameras and the endorsement of Vision Zero. Speed enforcement cameras to arrive soon.

Guthrie quotes Chief Cobey "We cannot arrest our way out of problems." Also mentions City investment in Community Wellbeing grants, which increased during pandemic.

The mayor mentions the Guelph Greener Homes (nee PACE) program, which will be coming to Committee of the Whole next week. Electric bus has arrived, the first of four (getting rid of 90 tonnes of GHG per bus per year), plus upgrades on HVAC at WECC.

Stats:

-Labour force participation as of end of Dec. 69.5%

-Unemployment rate second lowest in province

-Millions of \$ in new investment in 2022, \$200 mn + 200 jobs from 3 sources alone.

1,183 new building permits issues, up from 847 too. Guthrie notes that this a year (2022) that started with a lockdown, and included an election.

Tone shift.



Guthrie says that provincial legislative changes will have major ramifications. The housing crisis is smacking us in the face - and in the wallets - big time! And council needs to come together to build all kinds of housing types. Has to happen quickly.

Many players and many layers, including City and the Developers, but the third layer might be the issue: The Community. Guthrie says developers need to commit to put shovels in the ground, and community must commit to being NIMBY.

Guthrie says it's "the same recipe of complaints" that come from every neighbourhood. Not every development is going to destroy your neighbourhood to kill your kids with traffic. Time to embrace YIMBY. Welcome housing when possible.

Guthrie encourages everyone to support new development vocally. As for council, Guthrie says he's pleased that more staff for planning has been approved.

Guthrie says we can no longer accept \$1,000/month of a student room rental, and we can no longer accept \$2,000/month rental for one-bedroom. We must get housing built.

On Baker redevelopment and South End Community Centre. Guthrie shows two front pages from the old Merc. 2014 front page showing \$50 mn cost sought for SECC and another mentioning \$43 mn for Baker. Those costs are triple now. Delays cost money.

Guthrie says those approved projects have to get done whether you personally supported them or not. Asks for business community's help, especially with the new library where there will be things like naming rights.

Affordability will be determined by the Strategic Plan, which will then inform the multiyear budget. We're moving to long-term final predictability, so if you want to make an impact, engage with council over next few months with staff and council about Strategic Plan.

Lastly, impacts of homelessness and mental health: People are dying in our community from these issues. People are suffering, families are being torn apart, and upper levels of government have the solutions we need.

Community needs to get together to tell the ONgov that this is unacceptable and without help it's going to get worse. Big City Mayors asked for a meeting on this 8 months ago, and there's been none. Guthrie confesses frustration.

Guthrie doesn't want everyone to think it's all bad news in 2023. He's not going to play the victim card with the ONgov, but we will spend his time trying to figure out getting more housing faster. Wants to be best most affordable city.

That's the end of the speech, now on to the Q&A.

Shayani asks about the important factors in enacting the City's vision. Guthrie says the Strategic Plan is important, and also finding partners outside of government to help support those goals.

Shayani asks about improving engagement. Guthrie says there's an update coming about engagement processes, and the City could embrace tech better. Also, they need to determine what's not been working. He says City's also being proactive to learn from underrepresented groups.

Why not tap into surplus and reserves to keep taxes low this year? Guthrie says reserves were used to soften the blow of the levy increase, and some projects around corporate asset management need more funding, so surpluses move into those projects (the broken roads you hate).

Question from the floor: Is there an opportunity for social good to be embedded in SP? Guthrie says many staff and councillors are here, and they've heard that. As he said SP will need partners.

Another Q from the floor, this one from a student at U of G, what's the solution to high rate? The easiest answer is supply, he says, need more choice = competition. City needs to make sure council says yes to student-directed housing, and U of G has a roll to play.

Guthrie adds that if there are landlords here, it would be nice for them to hear about the struggle. It's important to hear from students and parents, who are also sweating the cost of housing.

Shayani asks how council is actually going to create that new supply. Guthrie says we need to rally around a combined plan agreed on by gov, community, and developers. Need shared leadership, and we can do it. ONgov wants 2,000 units per year, and need to abide to that.

Guthrie says the picture that went viral of 50 kids trying to rent one room is "unacceptable". We have to say yes to the things that are going to work, and he would never advocate for less engagement...

...but we need to get to yes, and if we can get to yes without having to come through council, that would be great too.

Next Q: Big opportunity to utilise the existing space, can the city provide grants or other encouragements? (This got a big applause.) Guthrie notes that there 250-300 basement apartments approved per year, and those don't have to come to council.

If they're not registered, that's a health and safety issue, and we obviously don't want to cut corners there. Guthrie also notes that new zoning bylaw was already ahead of provincial changes on zoning. 3 units per property & they're as of right (no council approval).

Next Q: Brownfield grants, especially downtown? Guthrie says it's crazy that ONgov doesn't give grants to clean up properties, this would be an easy win. Needs to advocate, and City will be looking at bringing back some of their own grants. They work.

Marva Wisdom asks about the Community Plan connecting to the Strategic Plan. Guthrie notes that the CP directly informs the SP and it's a living document. Council never approved it b/c it belongs to the community.

Guthrie also notes that we're not diversifying our housing units as much as we could be so we can also be more welcoming to immigrants. 18k unit goal can't all be basement units and tiny homes.

Zoey Ross from Exhibitionist mag asks about housing and arts & culture intersection. Guthrie says we've been talking about what Guelph is good at the last few years: Sports and Arts seems to be the answer. MAT tax can develop opportunities.

Also, City recently received a grant geared to helping the staff try and figure out the opportunities. Has in the past talked about making Guelph a music city as a part of the Tourism and Culture discussion going forward.

Next Q: How can Guelph do drastic change by doing the same old things? Guthrie says he's up for that, but we can do drastic inside the pillars of the SP. Also, all of council needs to agree on the SP in terms of direction, if it was just him, he could get out the sledge hammer.

Shayani asks how the City can adjust to the future of work. Guthrie says there are a lot of challenges in figuring this out with amount of commercial space, parking requirements. Concerned about so many people not working at DT offices anymore and still remote.

Guthrie says the City should be encouraging more home-based business, using a tiny home as the home office or something like that.

Q about getting council to work together. Guthrie says 98 per cent of the time, they're unanimous votes, it's that two per cent, and usually that's about money. Council is mostly aligned on the goals, and Guthrie says he's had to learn that when a vote is done, let it go.

That's it for the Q&A.

We're wrapping up with closing comments from U of G President Charlotte Yates who notes that the challenges ahead are substantial, but there's a good community energy about tackling them.

She also notes that it's important to remember that we've come a long way in the last couple of years and notes the comeback of this event (850 people here today according to the Chamber). Yates notes the incredible sense of community & a likely prosperous future.

Yates says the University is a public forum like the City. She hopes that the U of G can continue to work to build a better community. Students get hired by the businesses represented here, and thanks everyone for those opportunities.

Yates says that she's glad to hear the focus on the mental health since that's become one of her priorities. A new task force has been started to help tackle not just mental illness, but feelings of loneliness that many students feel.



New Task Force Solidifies U of G's Commitment to Student Mental Hea...

The University of Guelph is committed to becoming a leader in supporting student mental health. To meet this commitment, the University is launching a new...

<https://news.uoguelph.ca/2023/01/new-task-force-solidifies-u-of-gs-commitment-to-stu...>

She adds that this is not just a U of G issue, students are also integrated into community services, and the university has partnerships there too.

Yates says that housing is a big issue for the U of G, and they are eager to work with everyone to find solutions. A lot of expertise that the community can tap in to.

That's a wrap for this year's State of the City.



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