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Coming to you live first thing this morning from the Delta Hotel and Conference Centre for this year's State of the City hosted by the Guelph Chamber of Commerce. Stand by to hear what Mayor Cam Guthrie has to say about the year ahead...

Right now, CEO Shakiba Shayani is welcoming everyone to the event.

Sarah Haanstra, chair of the Chamber's board, says that she firmly believes that 100% of the people in the room want to live in a community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Meaning good jobs, competitive climate, good and decent homes, where ppl feel like they belong

Haanstra introduces some of the special guests here including Mike Schreiner, Chief Gordon Cobey, Dr. Nicola Mercer, Dr. Charlotte Yates, her fellow board members, et al.

Mayor Cam Guthrie takes the stage to begin his speech starting with the Mayor's Awards, which I believe is the first time they've been incorporated into the State of the City. Here's a list of this year's recipients:



We're now getting into the speech itself with thank yous, especially to CAO Scott Stewart and Library CEO Steve Kraft who are both retiring this year.

There's a slide on screen that says "Focus on the Facts." Guthrie says his goal is to clear the air of disinformation and misinformation, "There's way too much of that" he says.

Two top issues, Guthrie says, Housing and Affordability. He says housing is top of mind every single day, and it colours everything he does. He displays a photo of the housing continuum.



If you want to buy a home in Guelph, and you have an income of \$82k+, you still need an income of \$163k+ to buy at \$800k home with a mortgage of \$4k per month. Rent not much better with average \$2k for one-bedroom and nearly \$2.4k for two.

Guthrie tells a story. An anonymous person making nearly \$70k is apparently worried about becoming homeless. Another example, a family of 7, were renovicted and saw their rent jump \$1,000 moving 50 yards down the street.

Guthrie says that there are some bad tenants, and some landlords under pressure. Also notes again that story last year about 30 students all lined up to see one room. Cites the U of G developing housing plan, the Alma project and approval of student housing on Gordon.

Guthrie says that the City process 100% of site plan applications under the 60-day deadline. City issued nearly 1,320 building permits in 2023, and average length of time for zoning bylaw applications has gone from 209 days to 49.

Guthrie touts the receipt of housing accelerator funds, and says that city council supports more residential housing in Guelph. Council voted on 76 housing items, 13 recommendations on homelessness, 11 zoning and OPAs, and all but two passes unanimously.

Guthrie says that Guelph is committed to get to 18k new homes by 2031, or nearly 2,000 units per year. Last year the target was 1,320 units and we got there, but the target for 2024 is 1,500.

Guthrie quotes the Bank of Canada to note that this is a structural problem. When people say that the problem is *not* supply because it's definitely the supply.

Guthrie says that he sees positive steps with Housing Minister Paul Calandra, and thinks we're heading in a good direction. Believes there will be clarity in the next couple of weeks, cities approve housing, but developers build housing, and that needs to be clear.

Guthrie splashes a pic of the encampment in St George's Square. There's 173 people on the by-name list, and there 108 emergency beds, 70 supportive housing units, but there are more people in need than available beds.

There are about 20 encampments in the city, and no one should have to live in a tent outside, Guthrie says. There are 105 people on average trying to access shelters on a nightly basis, and there were 428 incidents of serious drug-related reactions, and 27 fatalities.

Guthrie says that these are not numbers, they're people. Everyone here has someplace safe and warm to go at the end of the day. He's talked to these people and heard their stories and

he shares some audio from a Bellevue resident.

From the resident: "It was cold, hard to find food. It was really not enjoyable because I never knew what was going to happen from day-to-day. It was just a bunch of running around, dumping through dumpsters and trying to get things and by things going thru the trash."

At Bellevue they've made friends, learned how to cook and do all the ordinary things people get to do in their ordinary lives. They want to finish their schooling and find their own place to live.

Guthrie says that this shows supportive housing projects are working. \$17 mn a year goes to funding these and other housing options, and City is giving \$4.6 million more. We're not doing nothing, Guthrie notes.

Guthrie lists some of the other things the City is doing:

- donated Delhi street property for new housing project
- funding for the Kindle Community
- new encampments medical team + \$100k funding

Also notes the impact of these issues on downtown businesses. Plays video from AMO presser in Jun 2022 where he said they were pushing for changes from the ONgov, urgent need for funds to combat homelessness and additions.

In the video, Guthrie says that cities are not structurally capable of responding to these issues, it's a healthcare issue and municipalities don't have the funding of the staffing. In the room, he scoffs. Cities still aren't getting help.

Guthrie says when you hear they're not doing anything, you have the mayors of 29 big cities saying they need help in June 2022! From Grace Gardens, to Wyndham House, to Kindle which is opening in a few weeks, the City Is taking action.

Housing Symposium. Guthrie says it acknowledged that this was a whole of community effort to fight homeless and cites key stakeholders from the hospital to Skyline to the DGBA and others.

Guthrie says there's a lot of collaboration with the community, and says that in the coming weeks the Social Services Committee of Wellington County will now include four members from Guelph council. This will reset the community to its former structure.

Guthrie says this will be a game changer for the community and a renewed commitment to collaboration between City and County. He also "shouts out" (!?) public space use bylaw, which is coming to council next week.

Last year: broke ground on Baker District and new library, and the South End Community Centre. Nearly 1,600 business licenses handed out in 2023, an increase year-over-year; now 3,500 businesses in the city. Guelph's labour force continues to outperform.

Guelph seeing strong recovery in the tourism sector, plus the launch of a new tourism initiative. Jan 2025 will be bringing the Grand Slam of Curling to Sleeman Centre! Touts Guelph as sports tourism draw, training base for the Toronto Argos!!

Crime and Policing. Improvements on response times and in the crime severity numbers, this despite the number of calls having increased. Also increase service to BEAT and

downtown units.

Guelph is also AAA in its credit rating, one of the Waterloo area's top employers, increased frequency on four transit units, more bike lanes and trails, new territorial acknowledgement, and Conestoga coming to downtown.

Hospital. They were able to reduce offload delays in the last year, special care nursery is now open and hospital will break ground on new ER later this year.

Affordability. Yes, 8.52 per cent increase in 2024, process made difficult by pandemic, inflation, et al, plus disparagement between what cities pay for and what the ONgov is supposed to pay for. Plus, there were changes to fees and DCs.

Guelph did get \$53.3 million worth of grants from the upper levels of government though.

For 2024, Guthrie says he wants to focus on continued improvement on housing and affordability. Have you ever changed your mind? He took a lot of time to listen to people over the holidays and #1 issue is affordability. #2 is housing...

...people say that they're on the brink of losing housing, or a business, or are one paycheque away from a problem. He says that Guelph can't afford 10% increase in 2025 so...

Guthrie announces that he will now use Strong Mayor Powers for the rest of the term. He's directing staff to get budget increase for 2025 under four per cent. He says it's going to be a "very, very difficult conversation" and the impacts will be "extremely difficult to accept."

Wants all outside agencies and boards to be on notice too. Wants them to be involved. Second, he will issue mayoral order to identify City owned assets to turn parking lots into housing opportunities.

Will also use Strong Mayor Powers to direct staff to present logistics to provide temporary structure encampments. County, local healthcare and other providers and stakeholder will also need to step up with support and a potential site.

We now enter the Q&A. Shayani starts with how the mayor's doing. He says he's doing good and he's now full committed do taking decisive action to help people.

Shayani asks what Guthrie's looking for in a new CAO. He says he wants to make sure that they cast the net wide, but the guiding star is the Strategic Plan and feeding into that is important. Housing and affordability is key.

Shayani notes that the Ontario Chamber released their economic outlook and the numbers weren't exactly encouraging. How can we connect the direction and biz confidence? Guthrie says planning and econ. development are key. Heard a lot about positive interaction.

Staff being hyper focus on customer service, and that's good because that's how people see value in the taxes they pay.

Question from the floor: Permits one end of the spectrum, but what about lag in building? Guthrie says there are capacity issues with infrastructure, but that's being addressed. Can that be accelerated? City's always looking at that. Plus, ONgov rewards city if we meet targets.

Next, question from Rotary member, how do organise to fight homelessness? Guthrie says start talking positively and don't create stigma. Volunteerism is good too. Third, funding. Home for Good campaign is a start.

Q about downtown business, four closed on Quebec b/c people don't feel safe. Guthrie says there's been significant investments, doesn't want to criminalise people for social issues, can't always be solved by policing. There's Welcoming Streets, IMPACT.

There was a pilot last summer that added another police patrol to the core, and now that's permanent. Guthrie says they've bolstered on both sides of the issue, and there's again that bylaw coming next week. Need to adopt and support that "balanced approach."

Guthrie encourages everyone downtown "It's fine." Also lots of parking, you can park at one end of Stone Road Mall and walk to the other, can't you? (No disrespect to Stone Road Mall.)

John Fisher from the Hiking Trails Club asks about, what else, trails. The G2G Trail to be precise. Guthrie notes that he and Fisher and staff met, and he's committed to amenities in all areas of the city, but his priorities are housing and affordability.

Question about partnerships in social services and not just police. Guthrie cites again Welcoming Streets, and the beat cops downtown are very well connected with service agencies.

To wrap up, UofG Prez Charlotte Yates leaves a closing thought. Thanks Guthrie for his leadership, thanks Shayani and the Chamber. She says the U of G is willing and "anxious" to help lead Guelph to solutions at the City's second largest employer.

Thanks a wrap!



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