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# Inaugural Speech

Fellow citizens, family, friends, staff and distinguished guests...

Welcome and thank you for being in attendance this evening. It is with the deepest gratitude that I thank our neighbours, the Kwantlen First Nation, for blessing this ceremony. I acknowledge that we sit here tonight on traditional aboriginal territory and I am hopeful that my experience in the area of Aboriginal relations with government will lend itself to the creation of strong bridges with both the Katzie and Kwantlen First Nations. You have my commitment that I will always treat you with the respect that your legacy deserves.

I am humbled tonight to sit before you as our city's new mayor. Tonight, we break with the past to forge a new direction for our city. First, however, we owe the greatest appreciation to outgoing Mayor Ernie Daykin, and outgoing Councillors Judy Dueck, Cheryl Ashlie, Al Hogarth and Michael Morden. For many years, you have been the thoughtful stewards of Maple Ridge and we owe you a debt of gratitude that only our equally dedicated service over the next four years can repay. Thank you.

I would like to express my incredible excitement about the four years that lie ahead with this team of elected Councillors. Each one of them brings something inspiring in their own right and I am looking forward to working with them. I trust that newly elected Councillors Duncan and Shymkiw will be quick to shed the term "new". They are bright, ran incredibly professional campaigns and are each a pleasure to work with. I am eager to watch you capitalize on the possibility that you bring to the table and I will support you completely.

Councillors Bell and Masse, I am glad that you are here to continue the work you started last term. Councillor Bell, you embody the term transparency and I am grateful for this renewed dynamic that will better allow you to deliver the openness that you envision for our residents. Councillor Masse, your steady determination in the areas of mental health and post-secondary education have thrust Maple Ridge into a leadership role in those areas that has only just begun. Both of you, please know that I am your constant partner in these pursuits.

Welcome back to Councillor Speirs and Councillor Robson. Councillor Speirs, from our time on the Community Heritage Commission, I have valued our friendship. You are gracious in your love for our community and a wise mentor as we explore with staff all that is possible during the next four years. Councillor Robson, I expect to call on your strategy and boldness often, especially as we explore solutions to homelessness and drug addiction in our community. We are lucky to have your wisdom at the table for the next four years.

My excitement to work with this exceptional team of Councillors is rivalled by my eagerness to see our sleeves rolled up working around the table with staff. I owe our city's senior staff an incredible thank you for warmly welcoming me in the face of what I can only imagine has been a challenging leadership transition. They have shown nothing but willingness and optimism in response to what is clearly a change mandate from the people. I have assured them that my leadership style is relatively simple – in my pursuit of a mandate I am straightforward, consistent and courageous. I never ask more from my team than I am willing to give myself. I keep my promises and commitments and I put people first above process. Together, I know that we will elevate our city and become leaders both regionally and provincially. We owe nothing less to the residents of our amazing city.

In order to get things done, I intend to lobby not with the strength of one but as a mayor representing the voice of 80,000 people. In numbers and unity we are strong. Know that I will never get so comfortable in my role that I forget who hired me. I made a commitment during my campaign to be open and accountable to our residents. I intend to report to you early and often and have already started a dialogue in City Hall to achieve this. When it comes to transparency, I will always push other levels of government for public process to be within the public domain and I will share my meeting schedule and outcomes with you so you understand the work that I am doing to represent our City.

We have a lot to accomplish and as of tonight, the clock is ticking. There is no room for a moment of complacency in a four-year change mandate and I am actively engaging in productive discussions with senior staff to set a process in motion that will allow us to establish our go-forward framework immediately and efficiently. We need to update our city's vision for the future and establish a strategic plan to deliver that vision. This will start with a targeted review of city departments, prioritizing economic development, planning and bylaws. The public has been collectively clear in their desire to see City Hall create jobs and diversify our revenue sources to alleviate the over-reliance on residential property taxes. This necessarily requires us to streamline our processes and cut red tape. We will work hard towards this and report progress often.

Our Official Community Plan has lost its integrity. A multitude of rezoning decisions have proceeded out of step with associated long term costs and frequently in the face of community opposition. The state of affairs surrounding development has resulted in collapsed bridges between residents and our partners in the development, building and real estate communities. We need to target the most urgent areas of the Official Community Plan to reset our trajectory in a way that is reliable, consistent and accountable. Doing so will repair the bridges between residents and stakeholders and get us working together on a path that is predictable and steeped in trust.

I would like to see us establish a Responsible Development Charter containing guiding principles on which to base future development decisions. This Charter would ensure alignment between development decisions and community values. It would also require us to consider development applications in the framework of long term costs and distance between the construction of residential homes and the arrival of essential amenities such as parks and schools.

It is unreasonable to expect residents in sprawl areas of our city to wait decades for a school. I made a promise to work tirelessly to get a school actualized in Albion and that promise will be with me each day that I wake anew. I expect Mr. Dalton and Dr. Bing, to rally alongside me in this pursuit. I believe that together, and with our School Board's support, we can bring the Ministry of Education to the table on this issue. Once we show leadership in the area of responsible development, we will be in a stronger position to begin that dialogue. I ask you to be ready when I contact you to bring that conversation forward with me.

It is also unreasonable to ask the citizens of Maple Ridge to pay heavily into transit and transportation without an acceptable return on those dollars. With a transportation referendum on the immediate horizon and Metro meetings already in the diary, I am now an active part of that conversation and will do everything I can to see services in our community improved. I look forward to a strong partnership with incoming Pitt Meadows Mayor John Becker on this and other initiatives.

Now, to the area of my platform that has garnered equal amounts praise and criticism – homelessness and addiction-based crime. As recently as last week, this push and pull between praise and criticism played out culminating in an interview with CBC Radio during which the host rightly stated that our homeless population stands at only 84 people – a number that we should be able to house given the right strategies. At the outset of my campaign, I promised to initiate a

Mayors' Task Force within 90 days of being elected to align the right stakeholders toward a solution. With the support of this council, we will bring that task force to fruition.

Having dealt with the challenges of mental health and addiction in my own extended family, I am no stranger to the complexities inherent in addressing homelessness and I will apply the same resourcefulness that I am well-known for to see our task force through to success. I want residents to feel safe in their homes, on our streets and in our parks, and I want our homeless citizens to feel embraced, supported and protected within our larger community. We are a community of thoughtful, compassionate and innovative people. Let's be regional leaders in approaching homelessness and addiction in our city.

With that, I would like to close this inaugural speech with some very important acknowledgements. First, to the families and supporters of Councillors Bell, Duncan, Masse, Robson, Shymkiw and Speirs I would like to extend my deepest gratitude for sharing these amazing people with our city. As efficient as we plan to be, I recognize their commitment will mean some dinners, evenings, and weekends away and I want you to know I will always be appreciative of the cost of this dedication.

Now, to my own family and supporters. To the members of my campaign team who are in the audience or at home. You are my forever allies.

To my brother Bradley. I could not imagine a greater person than you. You are my best friend and my closest comrade in this world. Thank you for always being there for me.

To my mom, who raised me and my brother on her own. Thank you for all that you do each day to support our family. I owe my strength, tenacity and resourcefulness to you.

To my sister-in-law Kimberley, my sister-in-law Grace and my mother-in-law Gail. You are invaluable marriage presents and I am lucky to have you beside me on this journey.

To my husband Steve. To think this journey started with a soccer ball. Your strategic mind is unrivalled and you challenge me to be a better version of myself every day. I could not be here without your support. It is a privilege to share my life with you.

To Benjamin and William. My little sons who are growing up faster than I can grasp. My favourite and most important job is being your mom. This leg of my journey is for you. You will have plenty of opportunities to share in community service!

Thanks again to everyone for being here tonight to share in this first step forward in an exciting four year journey.

Mayor Nicole Read