



Inaugural Address by Mayor Linda Buchanan November 5, 2018

A City for People: A Healthy City for All

Inaugural Address

It is my great privilege to present my Inaugural Address for this, my first term as Mayor for the City of North Vancouver.

Thank you for the confidence and support you have shown me by electing me to serve as the 19th Mayor, and the 3rd female Mayor to sit in the City's 112th year; a fact I am extremely proud of.

Congratulations to Councillors Bell and Back on their re-election, and welcome to four new members of Council: Councillors Girard, Hu, McIlroy and Valente.

The Message of this Election

Elections are often times of change and this past election was no exception.

Of the 20 municipalities of the Lower Mainland, only four will see incumbent Mayors return to office.

The North Shore, too, will see important change, as three new Mayors are sworn-in tonight.

The introduction of four new faces on this Council represents the single largest change in the leadership of our City that has occurred since the 1970s or 1980s.

But as much as change was in the air in this past election, the citizens of our community voted decisively for a Council that, in the words of our local press, is decidedly "urbanist" in perspective.

While many issues were debated through this last election – the redevelopment of Harry Jerome Recreation Centre, growth, density, traffic, possible amalgamation with the District of North Vancouver, and many others, small and large – our citizens returned a Council whose members by-and-large embrace the notion that North Vancouver is a City, not only in name, but in spirit, and that we are forging a unique place here on the North Shore that is defined by its distinctly urban character, especially in relation to the largely suburban municipalities that surround us.

In this regard, our citizens have urged us in this election to build on our successes as a community and to continue in a direction that has been defined by our predecessors.

What does this mean for the next four years?

I am deeply passionate about our community and, in particular, the people. People are what cities are about.

- I believe we live in an amazing City;
- I believe in the people who make up our City;
- I believe we are going to do something great together over the next four years.

More and more research tells us our health is influenced largely by our lifestyle and habits, than our genetics or access to traditional health services.

It is the social and environmental factors, such as the neighbourhoods we live in; our ability to walk or cycle to the shops and services we need; our employment; having access to housing and public transportation; locally grown food; clean air, water and proper sanitation; access to education; parks, open space, and our connection to one another are the things that matter.

In fact, our health is very much influenced by the very things we do here at City Hall, starting with the decisions we make at this table and, how together, we work and share this responsibility with our citizens, the broader community and our community partners to create A Healthy City for All.

My vision for our City is to be the “healthiest small city in the world”.

I believe as a Council, staff and community, we need to continually build our capacity and understanding as we respond to global issues at the local level in a meaningful way.

As a City we need to ensure that the services and programs the City supports, our built form, and the way in which we engage with our citizens not only lifts each and every one of us up, from our youngest to oldest citizen, but also increases the health and happiness of our community as a whole.

Our Official Community Plan provides an excellent foundational document to move us forward.

Housing, and access to housing, is fundamental in creating a healthy community.

There is no doubt that we are living through the most intense crisis of housing affordability in this region’s history.

Almost everywhere I go I meet people anxious to find a place for their aging parents, their children or themselves.

It also has a real impact on business. Business owners (big and small) that I talk to are finding it harder and harder to attract and retain the employees they need.

This is why, as a City, we must continue to tackle the issue of housing and affordability to ensure our City is a place where youth, families and seniors can continue to call home.

But let's be clear: our urban character does not mean growth anywhere and everywhere.

For me, our success as a community has depended upon growth that is at the right pace, in the right place and that is the right kind.

Our Official Community Plan establishes limits to annual growth – limits that have been observed and that we need to continue to observe.

Nor should we expect to see growth in every neighbourhood – or certainly not the same kind of growth.

One measure of our success as a community is that increasingly people are choosing public and alternative forms of transportation to live, work and play.

In fact, we now see in North Vancouver rates of public transit use that rival those of some areas of Vancouver such as the West End.

An integral part of this accomplishment has been our community plan that puts high density growth where it belongs: on the major transportation routes – which is to say along Lonsdale, Marine Drive, Esplanade and 3rd Street – areas that have long been planned for higher density growth.

In turn, this kind of development has contributed so much to the vitality of our commercial and retail sector and made places like Lower Lonsdale a “go to” place for people from across the North Shore and across Burrard Inlet.

But an equal measure of our success has come by ensuring that growth and density in what have traditionally been lower density or single family neighborhoods is “gentle” in character – basement suites, coach houses and other forms of alternative housing form that fits the character of these neighbourhoods.

But we need to be aware that this kind of support can as easily evaporate if we fail to heed the broad direction of the OCP as it has been laid out.

Community Building

Equally, we need to recall that buildings don't make a community; people do.

As much as we use our Official Community Plan to set the pace of development and its scale, it is as important – today more than ever – that we get the right kind of development.

Around us we find communities that are becoming more and more exclusive as more and more people find that a home – be it rental, supported rental or affordable ownership – is out of reach.

The City of North Vancouver has been a leader in the region in trying to run against this tide – but as the current affordability crisis continues we must redouble our efforts.

As we begin this new term, I want to challenge my colleagues on Council, as well as our staff, both to continue to use the tools and options that we've used in the past and to find new tools, new options for helping our City remain an inclusive place and a caring place.

We cannot let idleness or a lack of creativity stand in the way of ensuring that old and young, singles and families, newcomers and people who have spent their lives here, can have the assurance that North Vancouver can be their home.

In doing so we must also look beyond land use and development, we must go beyond a view of our Community Plan that reduces its many pages to just those few that deal with height and density.

We must pay attention to all those other chapters (and there are eight more) that speak to the programs and services, the public spaces, the infrastructure that makes our City a people place.

We know that as people's dwellings become necessarily smaller, so much more of their lives will take place in collective spaces – in parks, in plazas, in restaurants, in coffee shops, in libraries, in recreation centres.

Again, I challenge this Council and our City staff to continue to find new ways to ensure that our public realm is a truly human space, that is focused on the quality of living for our residents, not simply in a passive way because of the manner in which it is laid out, but in an active way through a change in built form and events and programs that will make a welcoming City for all.

All the best advice now suggests that one of the most important community challenges we will face in the next decades will be one of social isolation.

How we tackle that – and, especially, how we tackle that for those who are most at risk (seniors, youth, lone parent families, people living with disabilities, citizens with no social support, new Canadians) – will determine whether or not we can become the caring and inclusive community that we all aspire to.

My vision of A Healthy City for All includes transforming Lonsdale to the “Best High Street in Canada”.

Great streets are for people.

There is no street in Canada, that I am aware of, such as Lonsdale, where you can stand, look north and see Mountains and look south and see the Ocean.

A street that is book-ended with world renowned Arts and Culture facilities; heritage; and is home to a number of our businesses that are owned and operated by members of the Farsi speaking community, the Vietnamese and Filipino Community, to name a few – it is a good reminder that we are an entire community of people that came from somewhere else and together we need to create a sense of belonging and inclusion and learn from one another. Doing so makes us a richer and stronger community.

As your Mayor, I want my message to be clear the City is open to business.

We have seen first-hand over the past year the positive impact that the Lower Lonsdale Business Improvement Area has made in fostering a sense of place and connection for residents and tourists, all while supporting the small business community.

We must ensure this success story is replicated in other commercial areas of the City beyond Lonsdale.

The Port Industries are a vital component of our local economy with the high paying jobs they produce, and connect us to the larger economy of the Province and Canada.

As a City we must continue to work with them and support their success.

With the North Vancouver Chamber of Commerce we need to continually work to retain and attract both small and large businesses on the North Shore.

Over this term this work, along with other key stakeholders, will include looking at moving forward on a Health Economic Hub in Central Lonsdale, workforce housing and supporting improvements in transportation.

Transportation

Quite correctly, many in this past election pointed to transportation as one of the key issues we must confront.

The City of North Vancouver has been a leader in the region – and certainly on the North Shore – in providing public transit and alternative transportation solutions that will, in the long term, be crucial to helping the region and our City solve issues of traffic congestion and they are critical to our health.

While some will say we have been doing more than our part on this front, it makes no sense for us as a community to sacrifice our leadership on this file.

And I want to challenge staff and Council together to continue to build a community in which public transit or alternative transportation become convenient and effective options for people as they go about their lives.

Specifically over this term this includes, a critical focus on improving the walkability of the City; connecting the “two sides of the City” which are intersected by Highway 1, by moving forward on the Casano-Loutet Overpass and the Upper Levels Greenway; and the implementation of an electric bike share program all while updating the Bike Master Plan.

Cornerstone to all this work will be a primary focus on the safety of all road users, more specifically on the most vulnerable road users – the pedestrian and the cyclist.

But as much as we pursue these options, we cannot relieve our partners on the North Shore or other levels of government of their obligations as regards to traffic in our community.

In 1958, we had nine lanes on bridges connecting North Vancouver to the rest of Metro

Vancouver. Today, we have nine lanes.

But today, as well, we see communities here on the North Shore where more and more there is a divide between people who live there and people who work there – a divide that is making Highway 1, 3rd Street and the Low Level Road regular bottlenecks.

We cannot much longer endure a situation where our commitment to doing the right thing in terms of housing and alternative transit finds little or no support in neighboring communities and where the kinds of infrastructure commitments that, other communities in Metro Vancouver receive, are not provided to North Vancouver in equal measure.

As Mayor, I am committed to the recommendations of the Integrated North Shore Transportation Planning Project.

I will continue to pressure our senior government representatives for our fair share and I am optimistic and hopeful that the relationship with the other North Shore Mayors will be positive and productive and that we will represent the North Shore as one voice.

Relations with other Governments

Indeed, as your Mayor, I will continue to strike a balance in our relations with all our partner governments: showing leadership on the issues that will make a difference today and into the future; relentlessly defending the interests of the people of our community; and doing so in a spirit of collaboration and mutual respect.

I will continue a proud tradition that stretches back through many Mayors of making North Vancouver a leader at Metro Vancouver and at the TransLink Mayors' Council.

As well, I want to collaborate with key provincial and federal initiatives, in particular the provincial plan to review and reform the development approvals process, which is close to 100 years old, emphasizes division and conflict, that undermines efforts to build community and ultimately can lead to increased housing costs.

I will ask our staff to help draft proposals based on their experiences that will help us and the Province as a whole move forward on this issue.

In addition, I want to look at ways to partner with both the federal and provincial government to leverage available funding for housing and transportation, as well as for the renewal of our waste water disposal system.

While this is by no means as exciting an issue as transit, if we do not get the infrastructure funding we need or ensure we fund this locally in an effective way, our residents could well bear a future utilities tax burden that will make a significant difference in the viability of many households in our community.

From our innovative Lonsdale Energy Corporation, to the development of cutting edge energy efficiency standards for new buildings, to a plan to measure and reduce both corporate and community GHG emissions, to a Parks Master Plan that has rehabilitated creeks and forests throughout our community, the City has been a leader in the region in terms of sustainability.

We cannot surrender that leadership.

Nor can we surrender our leading record of fiscal sustainability.

We enjoy some of the largest fiscal reserves and lowest average household taxes throughout the region. This fiscal framework has given us the opportunity to show leadership on so many other fronts.

As we move forward in funding needed infrastructure and capital improvements, we cannot forget our obligation to ensure our financial advantages for future Councils and future generations.

And in this context let me speak frankly about the issue of the replacement of the Harry Jerome Recreation Centre – an issue that attracted much attention during and in the run-up to the last election.

I am absolutely committed to seeing the replacement of this important community centre.

But I want to challenge staff and Council to find a way to do so at a price that is far below the nearly one quarter of a billion dollars that the last Council approved to fund this project.

That figure is too high; it carries too many risks and must be reduced.

On issues of recreation, fire services, police services, arts and culture and many others, the two North Vancoovers have a solid record of delivering services to people in a cost effective way on the basis of a “shared-service” model.

I have been a supporter of this model in the past and I will continue to be so in the future.

But let me be clear: I know no member of this Council who supports the idea of amalgamation of the two North Vancoovers – an idea that would reverse more than a century of development during which our communities have become very distinct.

Quite apart from this Council, I have found no powerful interests in our citizens in pursuing this option.

While I will continue to champion our shared services and collaborations with other local governments, amalgamation is off the table for this term of Council.

The Relation between City Hall and Our Community / Our Citizens

As I close, I want to address one final, important issue that we will need to come to terms with as we launch ourselves into this term of Council – and that is the relationship between what we do in these chambers and the people who entrust us to be here.

It also includes the relationship with our youngest citizens, who are yet too young to vote, but whose voice absolutely matters.

The business we conduct in these chambers is absolutely important. The public input we receive at the outset of each Council meeting, in public hearings and public meetings, and in

the early public input process for development applications is equally important.

But we need to recognize that these opportunities and these issues limit our interactions with the public as much as they facilitate them.

In a world where so many people in our community find it difficult to be here for these meetings and where their interests extend far beyond the issues of development around which public input is most often encouraged, we need to find new ways to engage our citizens on their terms.

To build a truly caring community we need to have a deeper understanding of the people who live in our City and the circumstances that impact their lives.

The stories of their lived experiences need to be told, acknowledged and reflected in the way we design our City.

That means continuing to communicate to the public about what we are doing as a Council and a Corporation, but putting an emphasis on true engagement that emphasizes the exchange of ideas as much as the sharing of messages.

It means finding new ways – in an age of new social media tools – of helping people participate “virtually” on issues from development to social inclusion.

It means ensuring our committee structure, which too often reflects issues whose importance is long past, stays relevant and engaged with the realities of our citizens today and that the thread of engagement is pulled through each of these committees.

It means ensuring that effective public engagement is measured, not only by the number of messages sent and received, but as by the diversity of voices that are coming to the table – and that will mean a new way of not simply being open to public input, but of soliciting it from people who might not regularly find themselves engaged with or inspired by “municipal” issues.

So as we end the formal portion of tonight’s proceedings, I want to first say to our staff, I believe you are an amazingly talented group of professionals and I thank you for choosing to work at the City.

I have challenged you on a number of things this evening, and I want you to be innovative, to think outside the box, to be bold, and take risks (within reason), knowing that sometimes we may not get it right. From there we learn and adapt.

I want you each and everyday to be inspiring; to be inspired by others; and never lose sight of our focus: people.

To Council, I am so excited to get to work as a team, and together as a Council provide the leadership to find the solutions and make the decisions at this table that will create A City for People: A Healthy City for All.

And finally, to you the citizens, I want to once again say how humbled I am – and I think I speak for all of Council when I say this – by the trust that our people have placed in us.

And along with the rest of Council I pledge to fulfill that trust to the best of my ability for each and every day I will be lucky enough to serve you, our citizens.

Thank you.