

Investing in Ourselves: Greater Sudbury is ready for sustainable, positive growth

November 17, 2023

My vision of Greater Sudbury is an inclusive and affordable community, with world-class cultural and recreational amenities, a healthy environment, and a supportive economic environment for both small business and large industry.

My vision of Greater Sudbury also includes growing our population to 200,000 by 2050. Why do I keep talking about this?

We are an amalgamated city of many communities and a sprawling legacy of aging infrastructure. The vast majority of our arenas are more than 50 years old; 12 of our 14 arenas were built between 1960 and 1977, while the youngest was built in 1993 and upgraded in 2011. Our oldest arena is the 72-year old downtown Sudbury Community Arena. Of the five city-run pools, the youngest is 40 years old. In addition, we have 181 playgrounds, 24 emergency service stations, 90 lift stations, and a massive service area to cover. Our municipality has over 3,600 km of road lanes, which, if placed end to end, would stretch from here to Mexico.

A larger residential and non-residential tax base will help pay the costs of maintaining and improving our existing infrastructure. Rather than relying on the current tax base to pay these increasing costs, we need to have a larger pool of contributions.

We must focus on what we want this City to look like 25 years from now, not what it was 25 years ago. We can only do this by moving forward together and investing in our future.

For instance, our completion of the Emergency Stations review earlier this year resulted in the first investment in new infrastructure for fire services and paramedics since amalgamation. We have also made investments in community safety and policing, adding officers to our police force and hiring more municipal enforcement officers.

Our housing supply strategy is nearly complete; this roadmap will support development of the mix of housing we need, from purpose-built affordable rentals and seniors'

housing to single detached bungalows. Staff are developing a defined property tax relief program to incentivize multi-residential development in areas with existing infrastructure capacity.

We are making historic investments in our downtown, because every growing, vibrant, attractive city needs a central area that provides a concentration of arts, culture, entertainment, and hospitality; a place where residents congregate and visitors want to stay. Council has acquired properties in the South district of downtown to prepare the area as a regional entertainment destination anchored by the arena, the Sudbury Theatre Centre, YES Refettorio, and Place des Arts. Staff are currently developing detailed plans to redevelop Tom Davies Square into a multi-use cultural facility that brings the library, the art gallery, and the Sudbury Multicultural and Folk Arts Association under one roof.

Our Employment Lands Strategy is identifying and preparing industrial areas to ensure they are investment-ready. My message to companies that want to locate or expand their operations here is that we have the land, the resources, the talent and the ability to attract additional talent. We are ready to accommodate you and offer responsible financial incentives.

Obviously, we still have the day-to-day operations of keeping the city running. I have mentioned the infrastructure deficit we face, and how my push to grow our population to 200,000 is because we need to increase the tax base to help pay for infrastructure modernization.

Past councils have taken other approaches to keep property tax rate increases low. Some did this by taking money from the reserves and capital funds to subsidize operational costs. Current reserve levels are approximately 40 percent below minimum levels expected by our own policy, and well below sector levels for a city our size. This is not sustainable, and we are paying for it now in the form of aging public assets and deferred maintenance to our facilities – all within the context of rising interest rates and a depleted reserve fund.

This year, Council is embarking on multi-year budgeting, which will allow us to take a longer-term view of the upgrades and projects that contribute to our strategic priorities. I believe the time is right for us to invest in ourselves, our children, and our future with short-term financial strategies and a longer-term capital plan. This will require courage and hard work by all.

As we look at the next 25 years, these are very exciting times for the residents of Greater Sudbury and I know we are up to the task of making good things happen.