

Don Mills  
Chair, Greater Halifax Partnership  
Annual General Meeting Remarks  
Annual General Meeting  
March 25, 2004

Check Against Delivery

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this year's Annual Meeting for the Greater Halifax Partnership. This is the Board of Directors' opportunity to report back to our community on the progress achieved by GHP in the past year and our President & CEO, Stephen Dempsey, will do so a little later.

As out going Chair of the Board, I would like to reflect back on the economic progress achieved by our community since the creation of the Greater Halifax Partnership in 1996. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, we will celebrate eight years of work by the Partnership to re-define economic development in our community. As a private-public partnership, the Partnership has been a model for other communities across Canada in terms of engaging both the private and public sectors in the development of a strategic approach to economic development.

And while the Partnership does not take full credit for the robust and confident economy that is now Halifax, we would like to take at least a little. We recognize that the economic success achieved by Halifax is the consequence of the efforts of many organizations, both private and public.

Let's review a few facts. Since 1996, our local economy has added a total of 26,000 net new jobs. Our unemployment in 1995, the year before the creation of the Partnership, was 9.4%. Today that unemployment rate is 5.9 % and now ranks below that of other national cities like Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Indeed, our unemployment rate has been below the national average for nearly all of the past eight years. Last week, the National Post identified Halifax as the best place in Canada for those looking for jobs based on the latest Manpower survey. This was one of the Partnership's earliest goals as an organization.

The strength of the Partnership's strategy has been to focus on growth from within, given that eight-in-ten new jobs are created by local companies. Retail sales in metro now exceed \$4 billion per year, an increase of more than a billion dollars per year compared with 1996. The residential and commercial property base within HRM is now nearly \$18 billion, up 50% since 1996. In the past five years, considerable wealth has been created for those who own their own homes. The population of Halifax has increased for the first time in decades. The construction industry has enjoyed its greatest boom cycle in the history of the city. This growth from within has been built on increasing confidence in the future of our city, another of the Partnership's early goals. It could be argued that the last eight years have been the most prosperous in the long history of our community.

Perhaps more telling of Halifax's economic success is our growing reputation across Canada and elsewhere. Halifax has evolved from a regional Atlantic Canadian city to a national city located in Atlantic Canada. We are a national city in terms of our attitudes, our sophistication and our economic performance as an engine of growth for Nova Scotia. I noticed with interest this week that the new mayor of Toronto in response to the federal budget and the cities agenda, included Halifax in his reference to Canada's national cities. The Partnership is taking this message as an emerging national city to other jurisdictions through its partnerships initiatives such as the Greater Washington Initiative, the Greater Houston Partnership and the World Energy Cities. Mayor Kelly is now the President of the World Energy Cities Partnership. Later this year, we will be taking the Halifax success story to Calgary and Ottawa.

The GHP has worked in close association of other key community stakeholders such as NSBI, HIAA, HPA and MHCC to improve the strategic alignment among these like-minded organizations to ensure the efforts of all stakeholders are maximized in the promotion of our economy.

All this could not have been possible without the strong support within our community, from our investors and our stakeholders, from our small but hard working staff under Stephen Dempsey's leadership, and through the guidance and support of our committed and highly experienced Board of Directors.

I would like to take a moment to thank our staff first, by asking them to stand and be acknowledged for their contributions. I would also like to take the time and acknowledge our Board of Directors for their wise advice and counsel. I would like to thank our Mayor Peter Kelly and HRM as the Partnership's lead investor and both the provincial government through the office of Economic Development and federal government through ACOA for their continued support. Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank the 125 private sector investors for your commitment and financial support.

We live in an amazing community, a community where business leaders are prepared to make an investment in the future of their community without necessarily expecting any direct benefit to their organizations. We have nearly a hundred representatives here today from our private investors. Could the private sector investors here today rise and accept our appreciation for your support.

Ladies and gentlemen, with your help, Halifax is gaining a reputation as one of the best places to visit, to invest, to work and, perhaps most importantly, to live. The Partnership will continue to work hard on your behalf to promote our Smart City with our Smart Growth strategies. I believe the best is yet to come for Halifax and for Nova Scotia. Thank you again for your attendance today. Now I would like to begin the formal part of our Annual Meeting.