

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Dick Miller, Board Member, Greater Halifax Partnership
Chair, Economic Strategy Committee
Afternoon Panel Discussion Remarks (1:45 – 1:55)
Mayor's Forum on the Greater Halifax Economy
March 30, 2009, Halifax Marriott Harbourfront Hotel**

Stephen will introduce you.

(Title Slide)

Thank you Stephen.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am very pleased to see so many people here today.

I am happy to share with you some thoughts around the challenges, key priorities and next steps for the continued implementation of the Economic Strategy.

I know that Chris touched on roles and responsibilities before lunch, so I'm not going to dwell on this.

(Governance Framework Slide)

Quickly.

As you can see, there's HRM as Strategy Owner.

The Halifax Chamber of Commerce as scorekeeper.

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The over 50 organizations that all play a role in delivering the actions under the Strategy.

And, finally, the Economic Strategy Committee, that I chair.

Creating alignment and setting priorities.

That, as Mayor Kelly announced earlier today, Will now play an advisory role and is now known as the Mayor's Economic Advisory Committee.

Mayor Kelly, we look forward to providing counsel to you.

(Mayor's Economic Advisory Committee Slide)

Here is the committee.

Representatives from all three levels of government and the private sector.

With a wide range of backgrounds and experiences.

Guided by the principles of the economic strategy:

Avoid new bureaucracies.

Make use of existing structures.

Eliminate duplication.

Develop networks and partnerships.

Build on public-private approaches.

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We have stuck to these principles.

This is a great group of people and it is my privilege to work with them.

(Economic Strategy Goals)

In my experience, all business need a plan to grow.

And our city is no different.

The Economic Strategy is a five-year plan.

We have completed year three.

The plan has five goal areas,
94 actions and
28 outcome measures.

It is comprehensive and deals with many broad-ranging issues that are critical to economic growth in Greater Halifax.

The goals are focused on

Our:

people.

creative community.

awareness.

partnerships and,

our business climate.

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All of the actions support the goals.

And the outcome measures are how the Chamber keeps track of progress.

(Economic Strategy Outcome Measures Lights Slide)

The Chamber has created a scorecard with a lighting system.

Their lights indicate areas of required focus and resource allocation.

They are not a pass/fail assessment.

The Strategy goals are stretch goals and it would be unrealistic to have accomplished a majority of green lights by the end of year three.

Overall, the Chamber gave the Strategy a red light.

Meaning there is more work to be done.

However, in areas that are more directly impacted at the municipal level, we received a green light.

So the work that needs to be done will require more consensus and alignment among all three levels of government.

This is a task my committee is actively working on.

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(Economic Strategy Review and Next Steps Slide)

I am not going to get into a detailed analysis of the red and green lights here today.

They were, however, a very important input into our analysis.

Along with a review of the current economic climate and input from the business community and government.

Instead, I am going to speak to challenges that we continue to work on and new ones that have been recently identified.

I will also speak to what I believe could be some possible responses.

(Supercharge our Labour Force Slide)

I'm going to start with the Supercharge our Labour Force goal area.

And I'm going to spend the most amount of time here as I believe that protecting and growing our talent base is fundamental to the on-going success of our community.

Here are some of the challenges we have identified.

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Our population growth is well below target.

This is most likely related to retention and attraction of young professionals and immigrants.

With young people, in the last census, our net youth migration is still positive.

But it is declining compared to the previous census period and with our benchmark cities.

University Admissions are also well below target.

While all Universities are competing for fewer students, high tuitions are the most likely contributing factor for us.

Nova Scotia's tuition still holds the title for most expensive undergrad tuition in the country.

Immigration levels have stalled in Nova Scotia.

Our immigration target, identified in the Strategy, 2,900 immigrants by 2010, represents 80.5% of the Nova Scotia immigration target.

We are currently tracking below target.

As chair of the Province's Immigration committee, this area is of great interest to me.

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Our immigrant landings represent greater than 75% of provincial landings for the past three years.

And finally, Federal employment is vital to a stable economy in Greater Halifax.

We are entering a time where our federal workforce, the oldest in the nation, is ripe for cuts by attrition.

So here are some possible responses.

I believe we need an urban population strategy

As people have always been our competitive advantage.

Dealing with our “people/talent” challenge is at the core of our future economic success in Halifax.

This challenge has many dimensions.

Such as immigration.

I believe a substantial refocusing of efforts on Halifax gives the province its best shot at meeting immigration targets.

More attention should be paid to addressing the needs of business and educating them on the benefits of hiring immigrants.

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The Partnership has been working on this with their marketing campaign, their employer support program and their new connector initiative.

But more work needs to be done.

A welcoming community is one thing, but having a job is one of the top ways we can cement immigrants in our community.

More collaboration on missions and immigration fairs to recruit internationally trained skilled workers to immigrate to Nova Scotia is required.

And the distribution of immigration program spending should focus on community potential and the merits of proposals.

On young professionals, we must continue to encourage and support groups like Fusion Halifax.

Fusion was created as the result of research findings by leading YP consultant Rebecca Ryan.

It is a networking group for young Halifax residents who are inspired to make their city a better place to live, work and play

And, finally we must tap the full potential of post secondary institutions as youth and labour magnets.

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On tuitions, we need to get creative with all three levels of government and the private sector to figure out a way to reduce these costs for students.

We have an excellent value proposition for retaining federal government jobs,

We should move to fully implement the communication strategy around maintaining our federal and DND presence.

Finally, we should strengthen the links between existing population, talent and workforce initiatives.

(Leverage our Creative Community Slide)

In this area, public investment is slipping relative to our benchmark cities.

Cities that have a similar make-up and profile as Greater Halifax.

We compare our progress against that of St. John's, Quebec City, London, Regina, and Victoria.

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Government must move faster to identify and respond to infrastructure priorities as new key public investment can affect a range of outcomes.

Even modest public investment could lever considerable private sector expenditures.

We should set public investment priorities and confirm funding commitments.

It could be, for example, determining what is needed to fast track the construction of a new convention centre here.

This would have a tremendous benefit for events and conventions, as we are currently less competitive because of our smaller floor space when compared to our competitors.

We must work with HRM and other key stakeholders to identify next priorities.

And we should identify construction projects or other investments that can be moved quickly with leveraged public investment or expedited approvals.

(Create a gung-ho business climate slide)

There has been considerable progress on business climate.

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However, provincial regulation and provincial taxation continue to be persistent problems.

Tough new regulations affecting land and property development are slowing development of all types across the province.

For example, the Province's wetlands policy. (*Dick you can elaborate here if you like*)

What this points towards is that we need meaningful tax and regulatory reform in Nova Scotia.

But first, we need to acknowledge the progress that has been made.

We should continue to support the work of the Province's better regulations initiative.

We should also support HRM by Design, which has cleared a Provincial hurdle.

And is now being reviewed by HRM Council.

Another area of response concerns the African Nova Scotian Community.

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We need to increase collaboration and support of the three levels of government and the private sector concerning the development of a more comprehensive approach to issues limiting African Nova Scotian's participation in our economy.

We have to face up to the tough issues faced by this community.

Such as high unemployment, lower than average incomes, poor health outcomes and other challenges.

Just moving ANS residents to average incomes would add 100 million dollars to our economy.

Can we afford to ignore this?

I don't think so.

(Capitalize on our Reputation Slide)

We have the potential of declining business and community confidence that needs to be addressed.

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While well publicized and wide spread economic problems are at the root of attitudes, business confidence is affected by a misreading in the media and in business surveys of the inherent stability of HRM economy.

Our diverse economic structure makes us more recession proof than any of our neighbours.

We have to turn the tide of business opinion before negative expectations become self-fulfilling prophecies.

The possible response could be to develop a comprehensive strategy focused on addressing business attitudes.

(Convert Rivalries into Partnerships Slide)

Despite considerable effort to create alignment among the many groups delivering actions under the strategy, on some issues, everyone is still not on the same page.

While there has been considerable alignment between the main strategy implementers, HRM, the business community and the Partnership, important gaps in alignment exist with the three levels of government.

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I believe that this calls for a new approach to government relations.

(Summary Slide)

In closing.

It is clear to me

As Glen said.

That we NEED a Hub city strategy for Halifax.

All of the possible responses I have outlined
Here this afternoon
could fall under this umbrella.

With government coming to the table with the private sector.

And agreeing to invest more
in the growth centre for our province, and indeed, our region.

Thank you.

I'd now like to call on Brad Smith, Vice President at the Greater Halifax Partnership to kick off our panel presentation. Brad...