

Paul Kent, President and CEO, Greater Halifax Partnership

2010 Annual General Meeting Remarks - June 21, 2010

I would like to thank our Board Chair, Dr. Colin Dodds for his leadership over the past year. I'm very glad to be here at my first AGM, especially with so many in attendance. Thank you all for coming.

A special thanks to all the Municipal Councillors who are in attendance.

AGM's review the past year and set the stage for the new year - while I have a prepared text, you have our annual report so I will not go into much detail highlighting our operational activities and success.

I therefore will use the next 15 minutes to share with you my reflections, impressions, and perhaps, conclusions drawn from my first nine months as your CEO. It has been very busy – I average 20 meetings a week which makes for long days

I have spoken with most of you - in one way or another.

It's been roughly a year since I began discussions with a board committee about the CEO role. We agreed that it was time for the Greater Halifax Partnership to move from a background role into the foreground and dare we say front of stage presentation of what it can do.

We agreed the time of this was absolutely correct. The coincidence of time, the coincidence of a federal government which was now paying attention to the goals city play as a source of economic value and economic strength for our region. The fact that our provincial government was now operating from a strong majority with significant electoral support in Halifax, something that for the past eight years had simply not been present. We noted that the HRM was entering its fifth year of its economic plan and it was going to be looking for a new one in 2011.

So, on October 19 I began my association with Greater Halifax Partnership as its CEO and from day one I have always had a strong alignment around mission, mandate, principals and priorities.

My emphasis from the beginning has been to create new momentum and impact from the activity of the Partnership. To do so though would require a critical eye – there can be no sacred cows! I engage with my staff to create a willingness to challenge the status quo on what has been. I advocate a tremendous amount of transparency of activity, and I demanded a certain alignment of behaviors and respect for other like-minded organizations such as the Trade Center, Destination Halifax, Nova Scotia Business Inc. and the Regional Development Authority communities across the province. I demanded that there would be no outlandish claims of success and I talked about engagement for all.

I have learnt a lot about my organization, the environment in which it operates and the strengths and weaknesses of that environment. Most importantly, I have learnt a great deal about economic development - a new field for me –and I have learned a lot about myself, about what I do well and what I can improve on.

I have been told that I tell a lot of stories, I've learned that through stories you can achieve great meaning, so bear with me as I tell you one of my initial days in my office.

I remember the first day I went into my office, and I remember being quite bothered by it, by what was on the walls. One wall had a painting of a sunset; on the other wall was one of a historic view of Halifax as seen from Citadel. You see sunset's occur before darkness and foretell a time of rest, a sunset would

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be far better, they set you up for the day. The historical print, a very nice print may I say, but aren't we building a new Halifax?

The last one, which bothered me most, was a painting of rocks - a collection of rocks. They appeared to me as if they were falling rocks. Rocks are heavy, rocks are often in the way and they make progress difficult, rocks are not particularly beautiful and when falling, they are downright scary. You will be happy to hear, these paintings are now off my walls and I have initiated a conversation with John Mabley from the NSCAD to see if some of his students could create for a more positive and future oriented view for my walls.

Meanwhile, in my meeting schedule, I began to confront some of the attitudinal issues of the community brought on by years of poor experience. I found pockets of cynicism, criticism, disappointment and silo behavior – instances where the public sector is critical of the private sector, and the private sector critical of the public sector, both however, agree that its necessary to be critical of the not-for-profit and related economic development agencies - in fact, I found a lot of rock throwing!

Notwithstanding this situation, I was encouraged to lead and create a new reason for hope for our community.

My instinct and nature is to stress the good news - that we have all we need to be successful- that we need to get on with it. Hopefully my comments are not naïve, or superficial, but perhaps sometimes the simple pictures and simple messages are best, and that we simply just need to get on with it.

Inclusion, transparency, engagement and alignment were all possible and necessary for success - the Partnership then must be a vivid example of the right attitude, right behaviors, right priorities and the right direction and that's because attitude is an important ingredient of a healthy existence.

While coaching my organization in this direction, Halifax continues to evolve - arguably there is progress occurring right before our eyes. Much of this is documented in your annual report which I will not restate - but allow me to pick up on some of the good news it contains.

On the development front, Francis Fares project in Dartmouth King's Wharf has begun, Wadih Fares' Trillium on South Park project continues, complete with an interesting art competition. The Canada Games Center at Mainland Common – now this is going to be an impressive building! The Parks of West Bedford - Halifax's green living community, the new central library in the downtown core and there's been much ado about a new convention center - which I believe is a critical component of the vibrancy of our urban core – and I am thrilled to see the positive nature and attitudes from the media on that last week.

On the project front - and often with direct Partnership leadership and contribution, we've got lots to talk about as well.

UJAAMA - a name that you will be hearing more of in the future is a new organization dedicated to the African Nova Scotia communities of our province. The Greater Halifax Partnership has been working with representatives of the black communities of the province and has helped create this new organization. UJAAMA will empower the African Nova Scotia community to reach its full potential

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through self-reliance. Several of the coordinating reference groups are here and I would like to acknowledge them all because I think you are doing great work.

Smart Business – is an example of what we're doing with small and medium businesses. We consulted with nearly 300 businesses over the past year, helping to identify and tackle impediments to growth, helping businesses resolve their issues and maximize opportunities. Our Smart Business team has helped to create over 650 jobs this year.

You've heard the term 'Economic Hub' from us a lot lately. You heard Dr. Dodds talking about the Conference Board of Canada – and Halifax as one of only nine hub cities in the country. It's all about leadership. We position and promote Greater Halifax as hub for Atlantic Canada and a benefit of all in the region. The goal is to inform public policy, to generate additional investment in assets and to foster better alignment of interest - this does not mean we grow at the expense of other communities - growth in Halifax means growth for the region, province and the city.

Hub Assets, things like our universities, our air ports, our educated workforce, and sectors like insurance – benefits accrue well beyond our borders for these assets. Many of you will recall we completed a comprehensive study with NSBI on insurance industry impact.

We are also doing things with talent – we're making a big difference on the talent file. You know us for our work in immigration: awareness, our connector program, helping employers hire people from abroad and screening newcomers.

The Y2E program for priority youth. We have a framework created but are still looking for funding and are hopeful that we will receive that and take it to the next stage.

Next year our focus will be more on doing something tangible for the young and emerging professional community.

Finally, the Halifax Gateway which is managed by our staff. The Halifax Gateway has a \$3 billion a year economic impact with lots of room for further growth. The Halifax Gateway Council launched a new vision and strategic plan that will see Halifax become the preferred eastern gateway for North America and the world.

I argue there's been a lot of project progress but perhaps the most important project before us and one which is currently receiving the lion's share of attention from the Partnership is the definition of a renewed economic strategy for our region. Here alignment is critical!

We are currently in the midst of phase 1 of a four phase program which includes 13 stakeholder consultations - six of which have been completed already this June with eight more to go. I am expecting over 250 individuals will be involved in these consultations this month alone.

The consultations are characterized by industry sectors but will also include the voluntary sector, the arts and culture sector, and our young professionals. Consultations are being conducted in coordination with the Chamber and we thank them for their collaboration and support. We have been bolstered by the natural collaboration and- yes, dare I say alignment - which we are experiencing from everyone involved in this important exercise.

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I have the honor of chairing a steering committee comprised of the HRM chief administrative officer - Dan English, the Deputy Minister of Economic and Rural Development for the province - Iain Thompson, the vice president of ACOA - Debbie Windsor, the president of Nova Scotia Business Inc. Stephen Lund, the Halifax Chamber of Commerce - Valerie Payn and Andrew Boswell, and the chair of the mayor's economic advisory committee - Dick Miller.

Consultations are supported by a micro-site hanging off the partnership's website; it's yet another way to ensure the inclusion of all points of view in this plan. It is a means to solicit feedback and acts as a repository of information about the project. It also houses all the phase 1 consultation materials with the means to review and provide comment. All the leaders involved in the project are jointly committed to the creation of a single economic strategy for our region, one which meets the needs of all stakeholders.

I have told my staff to expect a busy summer. After the consultations conclude in early July we will be holding further stakeholder events in the fall likely around key themes for the strategy.

We are very committed to an aggressive schedule which culminates in late March with the tabling of the plan for our Municipal Council. The plan will include implementation considerations - with specific accountabilities for all participants in the economic well-being of our region. It's a tall order but we are going to do it!

The creation and implementation of this plan will fundamentally change our community for the better, not to mention the Greater Halifax Partnership. It is time to move beyond competition and divisiveness - it is time to set aside old wounds and look forward to collectively achieving common goals.

And to do so, we need everyone to be involved if we are to be successful.

Time for another story - one I hope you remember. My staff team have noticed that I am not that interested in membership drives, it's not that we don't need the money for we surely do, it's just that I believe the money will be there if we are doing the right things.

You see I believe in the power of a parade. Think about it - St. Patrick's Day Parade, Santa Claus Parade, Natal Day Parade, or the great parades south of us - Carnival in Brazil or Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Parades are contagious events - you cannot ignore them - and if they get large enough, they cease to be about the floats and more about the experience. It's because of this that I believe my organizations greatest contribution to our economic well-being will be as the convener of a parade.

A parade towards economic well-being, initially targeted to the creation of an interesting, compelling and contagious economic plan. It will be characterized by a degree of alignment between the players that we have not seen before, it will be simple in its messaging but potent in its implication. It is the most important thing before us currently and needs your involvement, now!

I close with thanks to all who have contributed to our work so far. To the members of my board, to all who choose to invest in the work of the Partnership, to my team who have rallied around this plan, to my colleagues in the other economic development agencies of our region and to the many volunteers.

Let's look forward to a great year ahead - and please, forget the rocks - they won't be needed - join the parade, its more fun!

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