

Remarks by Stephen Dempsey  
President and CEO, Greater Halifax Partnership  
Building our Future - The Future Starts Now Event  
Friday, June 22, The Cunard Centre, Pier 23

You know, to me, economic development is a lot like riding a bicycle up a hill. As long as you keep pedaling, you keep moving. You make progress and you stay ahead of the pack. It's hard work and sometimes you feel like you're not getting anywhere very fast. But the second you stop pedaling, you lose momentum. And, you don't just slow down, you grind to a halt.

Those who keep doing the hard work, those who stick to a strategy, fly past you. You find yourself having to work twice as hard just to catch up. More often than not it's too much work to get back in the race. You're simply left behind. It's no different with economic development.

We've been shifting gears at the Greater Halifax Partnership and so have a lot of others. People we work with everyday to help grow our economy. People at Nova Scotia Business Inc., The Nova Scotia Department of Economic Development, ACOA, The Halifax Regional Municipality and The Halifax Chamber of Commerce. Our 140 plus corporate investors. Community groups like The Black Business Initiative, The Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association and many, many others.

We've all worked our assets off – to coin a phrase – to get to where we are today. And I'll be honest, at times it's been an uphill struggle. God knows there are enough hills in this town, but look what we've achieved.

The Conference Board of Canada forecasts this year our Gross Domestic Product, the value of all goods and services produced in our city, will be the third highest in the country. That's right, you have to go all the way west to Calgary and Edmonton to find faster growing economies.

So what else have we achieved? More people in good jobs than at any time in living memory. Nearly 43,000 new jobs created in 10 years. Almost all of them in the private sector. Our population has grown. Grown by 30,000 people in the same period.

Look around and you will see lots of new residential developments, new condos and new businesses. These are some of the reasons why Foreign Direct Investment Magazine names Halifax as one of the top three cities in North America for economic potential. That's Smart Growth.

But it's not enough. We have to keep working. We have to keep pedaling so the bike keeps moving up the hill. Why? Because economies don't sit still. They either grow or they stagnate, and when your economy stagnates, you fall behind. There's no in between.

It's true we have grown. But to hold back now - to be cautious and put on the brakes - could be disastrous. Now, if we could say to every other city in the world: "Excuse me could you please stop growing for a little while so we can sit back and figure things out for Halifax", we'd have no worries. But that just isn't going to happen.

The truth is, everyone else out there, from Moncton to Mumbai, is working hard to achieve growth. Growth for their businesses. Growth for their communities. Growth for their people.

You know, the amazing group of business people who were here this week from India weren't here because they want US to grow. It's in their own interest to be here. They were here to drive growth in their own country and their own communities. But working with them on trade will help us both grow.

It's just not good enough to say, "OK. We've grown. Let's leave it at that." We all have to keep working at it.

You know, I sometimes think that we can be a little too negative; a little too critical of ourselves. So I will offer this warning. We cannot become a city where DON'T is the byword. A city where we don't have the boldness to take on big projects like the Commonwealth Games. A city where we don't build modern infrastructure like the Twisted Sisters project because we're bogged down in red tape. A city where we don't do everything we can to encourage skilled immigrants to come here and to stay. A city where young people don't want to live and work. But you know what? Halifax is a great city. It's great because of what we do.

And what does it take to do things? Vision? Yes. A smart plan? Yes. Leadership? Absolutely. So where is this leadership?

I've heard a lot of people complaining lately that we don't have the leadership needed to grow. Well, you know what. I believe we do have the leadership. It's here at the Greater Halifax Partnership. It's here in this room. And it's here in this city. It's in all of us.

Let me explain. At the partnership we have consulted widely about growth. We have listened. We have developed plans for Halifax to grow. All good and all necessary.

But, if I'm honest, I think people are sick to death with talk. They're bored stiff with discussion about strategies. We've got a plan. We've got a strategy. We've talked enough about them.

People in this city want to see things getting done. So let me tell you about some of the things that are getting done. Some of the things that are going to happen in this great city.

The Atlantic Gateway. This amazing port that we are blessed to have as a natural asset is going to double its activity. Not a question of if – just when. By tapping into the booming markets of south east Asia, the Port of Halifax - Canada's East Coast Post-Panamax port – will be the eastern gateway for the rest of the continent to Europe and South East Asia.

A big part of the Gateway's success will be developing the city as a transload shipment centre. This is going to happen because we no longer need to do every single thing

here to have a successful economy. You know, in a modern global economy you need only do a few things very well to realize a lot of economic benefit. And we do transportation and shipping very well.

Let me talk a bit about immigration. Yes it's true, our city's population has grown, but we still need more people. And they will come. People will come here to work and to look for a better life. We will double the number of immigrants coming to Halifax in the next decade. Again, not a question of if - it will happen. Because we will make it happen.

Let's embrace immigration and make it as easy as possible for new people to come here. The Greater Halifax Partnership is working to ensure that in the future you won't ever meet a cab driver who tells you they are really a doctor or an engineer, but they can't get their credentials accepted. Or they're leaving for better opportunity once they re-qualify.

And here's another thing that will happen. More of our young people will choose to live and work in the city they come from. The partnership is working with the world's leading expert on youth retention. We're the first community in the country to do it.

Next Generation Consulting is assessing what we are doing right, what we are doing wrong, and what we could do better to keep our young people living, working and making a difference in all parts of our great city. All of these things we're doing and more will ensure Halifax continues to be the best place to live, work and play. For this generation, and for generations to come.

So we're confident at the Partnership. The city has shown it believes in our growth strategy by backing us for the next five years. We are getting the same support from our private sector investors. We set a goal this year to reach \$5 million in support from the private sector. This will far surpass anything realized in any other part of the country. At the mid-point of this year we have already hit 75 per cent of that target.

To those who have committed your support, a huge thanks. To those who haven't yet, well, you'll be hearing from us soon. And this support – this public private partnership – is what makes us unique and gives us an edge in pursuing growth. It means we can do what others can't do because we do things together.

So good things are happening. But we can't let up.

You know, another thing I've heard people say is growth is bad. It will mean more traffic, more pollution, more social problems. These are real concerns for all of us. They are issues that need to be addressed, but they are not reasons for doing nothing.

Growth is not bad. Growth is good. Growth is critical. But not growth at any cost. We need SMART GROWTH. Growth that provides us all with opportunity. Growth that means if you buy a house today it will be worth more if you sell it in five or ten years. Growth that creates well paid, sustainable jobs. Growth that means we can afford to improve our roads to create beautiful public spaces to design and build modern offices

and housing to provide support to those who need it. Growth that respects the environment.

I've heard it said that economic growth is the horse that pulls the social cart. Well, we need to take good care of that horse.

My family has been living and working here for over six generations. From my grandfather who worked as a harbour pilot, to my uncle who was CAO for the City of Halifax, I am inextricably connected to this place. You might say that Halifax is in my DNA. So it's not a big surprise that someone like me is committed to Halifax.

But what encourages me are those people – like some of you here today – who have chosen to live here. You've come from another part of the country or another place in the world. You see the tremendous potential.

And as I look at the young people sitting with us today, I realize I am looking at the future. Young people like YOU are why we want to build a better place.

The Greater Halifax Partnership will continue the hard work that goes with leadership. We will continue to help Build our Future. We will DO what we can to ensure we grow. But we will do all of this in partnership and through co-operation. We all have a part to play in growing our economy. And I'll say it again. Make no mistake, we will grow. We will see new buildings rise up and overlook our harbour.

Just this week there have been stories in the media about redeveloping the Cogswell Interchange. What if it became our new financial district? I believe the Twisted Sisters project will come to fruition. Yes, tall buildings smack dab in the middle of our city. The first in a generation.

We will see barriers to trade dropped. We will see red tape cut. We will see development of our downtown core. We will see more and more immigrants take up lives in our city. We will grow. Together.

A little while ago we were talking around the office about the message we wanted to get out today. Someone said: "We just need a kick in the assets." We laughed. But then we thought maybe that's right. We have all the assets we need to grow. It's what we do with these assets that will make us grow.

We need to focus our attention on answering questions like: Where is the best place to build our new office towers? How many people should live in our downtown core? Where do we need new homes? New transit? New recreational facilities? How can we get them built AND protect the environment, our public spaces and our priceless heritage architecture.

So when you leave here today, ask yourself this: "What can I DO to help Halifax grow?" Decide. And do it.