

Speaking Notes - Mayor Amarjeet Sohi

State of the City Speech - Edmonton

May 9, 2023

Good afternoon. My friends, thank you for joining me today.

Thank you to Haydar Al Dahhan, and the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce for bringing us all together again. I look forward to our ongoing collaboration.

We are fortunate to be meeting here on Treaty 6 Territory. This is the traditional gathering place and meeting ground of the Cree, Dene, Nakota Sioux, Saulteau, Blackfoot, Inuit and many others.

This is also the Métis homeland and home to one of the largest Inuit communities south of the 60th parallel.

I would like to thank Elder Morin for sharing her voice and prayer with us.

First of all, I want to thank my wife Sarbjeet for being here today to support me. She is my biggest champion and I would not be standing here in front of you today as your Mayor without her support and encouragement.

I would also like to acknowledge my Council colleagues. They have been working hard from the day they got elected.

With the assistance of our City Manager Andre Corbould and his team, this City Council is now implementing an ambitious four-year budget that will reduce City spending by \$60 million dollars – one of largest reductions in this city’s recent history.

Through this budget, Council also committed to reallocating \$240 million dollars of existing resources to improve core services and refocus on priorities that will make Edmontonians’ lives better and more affordable.

We are achieving this because our Council works together.

Council colleagues, can you please stand up to be recognized for your hard work.

Over my years in public office, I have visited so many cities across the country. Every time I leave home, I am reminded that what we have here in Edmonton is truly special.

You can come to this city with very little and our community will lift you up and make sure you succeed.

I think about people like Radhe and Krishna Gupta. They launched their Rohit Group of Companies from a home office in 1986.

Just recently, they gave back to the community that helped them succeed by donating \$1.5 million dollars to the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers.

Theirs is truly a made-in-Edmonton story.

In Edmonton, we work together.

In Edmonton, business is a community, not a class.

## **Regional Collaboration**

I also want to acknowledge that Edmonton would simply not be what it is today without our regional partners. I have said before that when investment comes to our region they get 13 Mayors working together.

And right now, we are working together to keep all our constituents safe during this devastating early wildfire season.

I want you to know that Edmonton is here to help. We have

opened the Edmonton Expo Centre to support folks evacuating their communities and we have sent resources and Edmonton Fire Rescue Service teams to supplement local efforts.

To our regional Mayors, thank you for joining us. We are keeping you in our thoughts today.

We are one of the youngest and fastest growing regions in North America. We come to the table with more than 1.4 million residents, more than double the national average in export growth, and nearly a third of Alberta's GDP.

I will remain focused on growing our partnership with surrounding municipal leaders. And I know we all come together with one common goal... to be better than Calgary.

I'm just kidding. But together, we are able to attract bigger and better investment opportunities.

And you know what? The world is noticing.

We are no stranger to innovative energy projects. It is in our history.

In 1928, almost 100 years ago, Dr. Karl Clark discovered how to

get the oil out of the sand in a small lab at the University of Alberta.

And innovation is in our future. Once again, an energy revolution is taking shape in our region.

The hydrogen economy is a multi-trillion-dollar global investment opportunity.

In partnership with Strathcona County, we are testing two hydrogen fuel cell buses, with plans to expand that fleet.

Edmonton Global is leveraging the collective buying power of our region to get five thousand hydrogen vehicles on the road by 2028. And our Airport has already purchased 10 hydrogen vehicles for use at the terminal.

Our friends at ATCO are also leading the way. They helped Edmonton become the first City to power a major building with hydrogen during the Canadian Hydrogen Convention last month.

8,000 delegates from over 70 countries experienced that innovation, right here in Edmonton.

Our region will also be home to a new Air Products facility. It will be North America's first net-zero hydrogen production facility, bringing jobs to North East Edmonton and beyond.

I have been proud to represent Edmonton's innovative spirit on the global stage at COP-27 in Egypt, The Cities Summit of the Americas in Denver, and to international investors in Edmonton.

Because climate change does not stop at municipal boundaries, and neither do our solutions.

And as your Mayor, I commit to making our city known as the global investment hub for climate solutions like green construction, clean technology, green manufacturing, and hydrogen technologies.

And City Council is backing up that global promise with our own local commitments.

We are investing \$320 million into climate action, supporting our green building industry, expanding our active mobility network, ensuring our City vehicles are emissions-neutral, upgrading City buildings to net-zero, and planting trees to clean our air and shade our streets.

Soon, Edmonton will be the first city in North America.. Yes, the first city... to build a transit facility that accommodates a fully zero-emission fleet including hydrogen-fuelled buses.

We are also walking the talk by building a more compact and denser city, reducing red tape, overhauling our zoning regulations and removing other barriers to growth.

Our regional collaboration has continued to pay off in the health sciences sector too.

In 2020, all regional Mayors advocated for funding for a landmark project in our biomedical industry.

Since I took office, I worked tirelessly with the University of Alberta, Applied Pharmaceutical Innovation and their phenomenal leader Andrew MacIsaac to advocate to the federal government to fund this job creating project.

That collective advocacy resulted in the newly announced Canadian Critical Drug Initiative, with \$80 million of federal funding.



This initiative will position Edmonton as a hub for leading-edge pharmaceutical manufacturing, reducing our dependence on vaccines produced globally.

When we collaborate, we are capable of incredible things. I cannot wait to see what big ideas we can get off the ground next.

And speaking of taking off, our international airport, YEG, had a watershed year.

While serving 5.85 million passengers, YEG is driving innovation and economic growth.

They are building a 2,000 acre International Cargo Hub. It will be the greenest logistics park in North America and serve as a vital trade corridor for Canada and the United States. This will create great local jobs.

## **Talent Attraction and Retention**

We are committed to building an environment that meaningfully supports growth.

This includes making sure the best and the brightest have a reason to choose Edmonton. An affordable city, yes. But more

than that, a fun city, a compassionate city, and an inclusive city that they can proudly call home.

Why does this matter? Well, by 2050 half of Edmonton's population will be immigrants. And that's good news.

For every 1,000 new families that become our neighbours, we will see an increase of \$84 million in new household spending and \$20 million per year in tax revenue across all orders of government.

This is why a focus on young people is so important.

In April, I invited youth to join the meeting of my Mayor's Advisory Council on Business Growth and Opportunity.

And, I am constantly inspired by young people.

Simran Dhillon, a science student, told the group that you don't have to go to Silicon Valley to change the world, you can do it here in Edmonton. And she is proving it.

At her company FentaGone, Simran is developing a special syringe. This syringe indicates if the substance inside contains a lethal dose of fentanyl to prevent overdoses on the street level.

Her research is being made possible by our incredible post-secondary sector and medical innovation community.

I want to see more ideas and creativity supported in our city.

That is why our recent budget invested \$490 million on Economic Development initiatives. That includes opening up industrial land supply, and start-up money for a new innovation accelerator fund: the Edge Fund.

We are scaling-up creative investments by permanently funding Edmonton Screen Industries Office and providing ongoing support for the Edmonton Arts Council, and the Heritage Council.

This year, Edmonton wowed the country when we hosted the JUNO Awards. And we are investing in Explore Edmonton to attract more of these world-class events to our city.

Our work has a projected economic impact of \$900 million over the next four years.

Nowhere are the results of this type of business and community collaboration more evident than on Happy Beer Street.

This 22-block span between Ritchie and Old Strathcona is filled with entrepreneurs, including eight breweries, with more on the way. And on paper, they should be competitors.

But folks like Greg Zeschuk of Blind Enthusiasm Brewing have a different outlook. Instead of competing, they work to promote each other. They collaborate on special brews and they support nonprofits and community groups.

This street is a favourite for Edmontonians, and is attracting tourism.

This is the power of collaboration in Edmonton. People are drawn here.

Right now downtown and our local businesses are buzzing with playoff activities.

Today, I am launching the Meet Me Downtown campaign.

All of you are ambassadors for our city and I hope this campaign inspires you to invite a colleague, family member, or potential investor to meet you in the economic and cultural heart of Edmonton.

And you will hear more about this work tomorrow.

We are working with the Downtown Business Association to boost our night time economy. We are activating our well-loved public spaces like Churchill Square and City Hall Plaza with music, events, and festivals.

And to build on our previous successful Downtown Vibrancy Grants, I am so glad to announce that today, we have opened a third round of grant funding with \$6.5 million available immediately.

Previously, these grants have sparked 61 projects, boosting cultural events like the longstanding Cariwest Festival. Cariwest used their grant to completely transform Churchill Square into a Caribbean village.

But I would like to think it was simply my presence as parade marshall that inspired more than 60,000 people to come downtown.

Cariwest is a shining example of how Edmonton's unique arts and culture scene can support business and economic recovery. Such events create opportunities for people to come and enjoy Downtown.

Let me also tell you about Hiregood, a social enterprise owned by Boyle Street Community Services, and about one of their employees Debbie.

Debbie has been a washroom attendant at the Whyte Ave public washroom for three years. Hiregood's washroom attendants like Debbie have decreased the number of emergency calls at the Whyte Ave washroom by over 90%.

In fact, this has been so successful, that the City has expanded this program to more than 16 locations in parks, libraries and transit centres across Edmonton. Debbie and Hiregood are keeping Edmonton clean, welcoming, and vibrant.

Because clean, welcoming and vibrant communities are also safe communities.

Safety is a long standing issue that I hear about from business owners, investors, and everyday Edmontonians. And I heard that again when I met with some of Edmonton's top business leaders and property owners last week.

I want you to know that I hear you and your City Council has been taking action from the day we were elected. Our goal is to make

our city a safer place for all Edmontonians including those who are struggling on our streets.

In collaboration with Edmonton Police Service and the social sector, your City Council is showing leadership and we are implementing tangible solutions.

We have increased and stabilized EPS funding. We have almost doubled the number of Transit Peace Officers and we have increased outreach teams from 2 teams to 7 to improve safety in our Transit System.

In 2022, we housed 1,630 people. We are continuing to invest more than \$170 million to build more supportive and affordable housing to end homelessness.

And we are supporting Downtown and Chinatown with more additional funding for cleaning, business improvement initiatives, and activation of public spaces.

At your table you will find a card with a QR code. You can scan that to learn more about the actions that are underway to improve safety and wellbeing in Edmonton.

But, I hope you understand that safety is a shared responsibility and your City Council cannot do it alone. I stress to you as I stressed to the business leaders last week: we need your help.

The same card also gives you access to the information that you can use to help us.

I encourage you to use this information to engage in the provincial election. Ask your local candidates about their vision for our city.

Talk to them about our needs and ensure that Alberta's capital city is being supported.

We have solutions that work and our provincial government can help us to scale them up.

With us today is Joe, he owns a McDonald's restaurant by the Kingsway Mall, close to the Royal Alex Hospital and a transit hub.

Joe and his staff have dealt with their share of disorder. He reached out for help, and we are working with him.

Joe has a background in healthcare. Of course, he wants to keep his business and employees safe, but he also knows that



enforcement must be paired with better access to healthcare, housing, and social services.

That is how we will create a safer city for all.

### **Edmonton is a city of firsts.**

In my earlier remarks, I highlighted that we are a city of many firsts.

Along with those examples, we are Canada's first UNESCO Learning City, we are home to Mosaic Centre: Canada's first net zero office building.

We have kihcihkaw askî, the first City-supported outdoor Indigenous ceremonial space, and Fort Edmonton Park's Indigenous People's Experience, the first exhibit of its kind in Canada.

And now we will be home to a global first. Heidelberg Materials, is undertaking a \$1.36 billion project that will enable them to produce the first carbon-neutral cement in the world. And it will happen at their facility right here in North West Edmonton.

This facility will create good jobs while reducing emissions by up to one million tonnes annually. That is the equivalent of taking approximately half of Edmonton's passenger vehicles off the road each year.

We are also making Edmonton a competitive place to do business.

In January, the Canadian Home Builders' Association ranked us number one in Canada for our local development processes, approvals, and costs.

Our approval process for development applications is now twice as fast compared to Vancouver and Toronto.

And we're not done. We are directing administration to make processes clear, consistent, and predictable for more business sectors.

Edmonton is a city of collaborators. The people in this room and beyond this room have helped to build our communities into strong and vibrant places.

For that, I am grateful.

I am very optimistic about our city, but I am also not naive.

While our economy is on the right track, many Edmontonians are still being left behind. People are still facing poverty, racism, discrimination, and marginalization.

We still have a long way to go on reconciliation, and we have big issues to tackle like mental health, drug poisoning, and housing.

But my optimism is rooted in the community. Wherever I go in this city, I see people working together, finding solutions, and unlocking our city's potential with hope and optimism.

To build an Edmonton for all of us, that collaboration must continue and my State of the City updates do not end here. I want to continue to hear your perspectives and your ideas.

So I invite you to join me to dive deeper into topics like climate action, supporting our youth, and how business can work with the social sector for economic growth.

I will announce these State of the City panel discussions on my website: Mayor Sohi dot c-a, shortly. And I encourage you to join me.

Let's continue to work together to build a prosperous city for everyone.

Thank You.