

Tuesday, January 21, 2025  
Ottawa Board of Trade Keynote  
Mayor Mark Sutcliffe

Good morning.

It's great to join everyone today and to see so many familiar faces.

I don't see Elon Musk or Mark Zuckerberg here though.

It's certainly interesting to be speaking at this time, the day after Donald Trump's inauguration, and while we are waiting to find out who the next prime minister of Canada will be.

That's how we're starting 2025.

At least President Trump has his sights set on the Panama Canal and not the Rideau Canal.

So I think this is a good time to take a look at where we stand as a city.

Let's start with the fact that we live in an amazing city.

We have our challenges, but let's never forget how lucky we are to live in Ottawa.

We have a wonderful community, with so many terrific leaders, including many people in this room today, who care about our city, who support the most vulnerable, who invest their time in building a better future.

*Nous avons une communauté incroyable, avec de nombreux leaders formidables, y compris beaucoup d'entre vous ici aujourd'hui, qui se soucient de notre ville, qui soutiennent les plus*

*vulnérables, qui investissent leur temps pour construire un avenir meilleur.*

There is so much natural beauty in Ottawa.

Ottawa is truly a great place to live.

We have wonderful rural villages, suburban communities, and urban neighbourhoods.

It's a wonderful, safe place to raise a family.

We have terrific restaurants. We have amazing museums and galleries and so much culture.

The music scene has been growing.

We have been building a strong and vibrant economy. We have the highest educated workforce in the country.

We have three strong pillars in government, technology, and tourism.

I know you know all this. But I think it's all worth repeating.

It's important to remind ourselves of how lucky we are.

How many other cities have so much going for them?

I've lived here my whole life. And when you've lived your whole life in Ottawa, you take some things for granted.

You forget how wonderful it is here. You forget how we are the envy of the world.

We have challenges in Ottawa, and I'm going to talk candidly about them today. But

I talk to mayors all over the world and there are so many of them who would gladly swap their challenges for ours. There are so many people all over the world who can only dream of living in a city like Ottawa.

*Il y a tellement de gens partout dans le monde qui ne peuvent rêver que de vivre dans une ville comme Ottawa. J'entends tout le temps des gens qui y ont déménagé et qui l'adorent.*

I hear all the time from people who have moved here and they love it.

I spoke with a couple a few weeks ago and they had moved here from the GTA.

Their kids had gone to university in Ottawa and stayed here, so when they retired, they moved here to be closer to their kids and grandchildren. They absolutely love it here.

So let's never forget how fortunate we are to live in and contribute to this great city.

And we have a lot going for us right now.

We just hosted the World Junior hockey championships. What a great event for our city.

I spoke with officials from the International Ice Hockey Federation and Hockey Canada and they were thrilled with the success of the event.

They want to bring more events to Ottawa.

Speaking of hockey, our new professional women's hockey team, the Ottawa Charge, led the PWHL in attendance in its first season.

And the Senators are competing for a playoff spot right now. They just won a couple of very exciting games on the weekend.

We have more great events to come.

*Cette année, nous organiserons l'Ironman Canada pour la première fois. Cela attirera des milliers de personnes dans notre ville.*

This year, we'll be hosting Ironman Canada for the first time. That will bring thousands of people to our city.

There are lots of other events and conventions coming to the city.

Live Nation is investing in a new concert hall in the ByWard Market. There are new restaurants opening in the Market as well.

We're making progress on public transit. As you know, light rail has been one of the most challenging files I inherited when I became mayor.

*Comme vous le savez, le train léger a été l'un des dossiers les plus difficiles que j'ai hérités lorsque je suis devenu maire. Nous avons encore un long chemin à parcourir.*

*Mais nous faisons des progrès. Il y a deux semaines, nous avons ouvert la nouvelle ligne Trillium et tout se passe extrêmement bien jusqu'à présent.*



We still have a long way to go. But we're making progress. Two weeks ago, we opened the new Trillium Line and it's been going extremely well so far.

This Saturday we'll expand it from five days a week to six days and if all goes well, a few weeks after that we'll get to full seven-day service.

This successful launch followed an extremely rigorous and transparent testing process in November and December.

And we're going to be just as rigorous and transparent as we launch further phases of the expansion in the months ahead.

And thanks to the efforts of Ottawa Tourism and the Ottawa Airport, we're making progress at securing more international flights.

*Et grâce aux efforts d'Ottawa Tourism et de l'Aéroport d'Ottawa, nous faisons des progrès pour obtenir davantage de vols internationaux.*

This is something I hear about a lot from the business community.

The Air France flight to Paris has been a great success. They've upgraded the size of the aircraft and increased the number of flights per week.

And in just a couple of months Air Canada will be launching its direct flight to London.

So we're making progress and we have a lot to look forward to.

But we also face some pretty big challenges. I don't want to be dramatic, but I would say a few of them are historic challenges.

I'll be honest with you: I worry a lot about the future of downtown and the ByWard Market.

*Je m'inquiète beaucoup pour l'avenir du centre-ville et du marché By. Le gouvernement fédéral a déjà annoncé son intention de réduire ses espaces de bureaux jusqu'à 50 %.*

The federal government has already said it intends to reduce its office space by as much as 50 per cent. That's never happened before in our city.

Even though there are more people downtown since the return to office moves by the federal government in September, we're still not back to pre-pandemic levels.

It's going to take years for a full recovery to happen, and we can no longer count on federal government employees to fill that gap.

We need to make sure there are more people living downtown, and more attractions downtown.

We also need to see more collaboration between the city and the federal government so that any surplus federal properties are used strategically.

Let's get everybody working together to figure out the best use for these buildings.

I think the federal government has a responsibility as the number one employer and the number one property owner in the city to work with us on a plan.

I'm going to work with city staff to make sure that happens.

*Je m'inquiète aussi pour l'avenir de notre économie locale. Hier, comme vous le savez, une nouvelle administration a pris le pouvoir aux États-Unis.*

I also worry about the future of our local economy. Yesterday, as you know, President Trump talked about imposing tariffs on Canada within a couple of weeks.

There is a significant risk of a trade war between our two countries, one that could create enormous uncertainty and even economic damage.

And we are already starting to hear talk of job cuts in the federal public service. That's a huge threat to our local economy, and we need to be ready for it

I remember in the mid-1990s when there were thousands of federal job cuts. We got the community working together to rebuild the economy.

We all pulled together and found a way. Because that's the way we do things in Ottawa.

We're going to need growth in the private sector to offset the setbacks in the public sector.

We're must continue to diversify our economy, to support entrepreneurship, to grow more companies and create more jobs.

Economic growth is vitally important for our future. Because economic growth is what drives progress for all our residents.

It's what generates the resources we need to face all of our challenges, including and especially supporting the most vulnerable.

And as you know, the number of vulnerable people in our community is growing.

The number of people who are homeless, who are suffering from the opioid crisis or are facing mental illness, is growing.

And that has a big impact on downtown and the ByWard Market and our entire city.

We've been working hard with other levels of government to get some help.

We're putting more money into social services and public safety in the downtown and ByWard Market.

In our most recent budget, we added \$30 million that will be distributed to a number of agencies that support the most vulnerable.

We put more money toward food security as well.



*Dans notre budget le plus récent, nous avons ajouté 30 millions de dollars qui seront répartis entre plusieurs organismes qui soutiennent les plus vulnérables.*

*Nous avons également alloué davantage de fonds à la sécurité alimentaire.*

And I'm grateful for the leadership of the Ottawa Board of Trade on building a plan for downtown Ottawa.

We all need to get behind that and make it work. Because that's the way we do things in Ottawa.

We are also seeing a rising number of people who are arriving in Ottawa seeking asylum.

And that number could increase even further with a new administration in the United States.

The last time Donald Trump was elected president, there was a spike in refugee claimants in Ottawa. We may see that again this year.

Immigration is a very sensitive topic right now, around the world. It's a very politically charged topic.

But let's remember that immigration is a federal responsibility. We don't decide how many people arrive in Canada or in Ottawa every year.

*L'immigration est une responsabilité fédérale. Nous ne décidons pas combien de personnes arrivent au Canada ou à Ottawa chaque année.*

But as a city, we do have the responsibility to respond and support whoever arrives here. That's not an easy task.

Let's also remember that Ottawa has always been a kind and compassionate community. A welcoming community.

When my mother's family left communist China in the 1950s, they came to Ottawa. My grandparents were just a little bit younger than I am today.

And they started their lives over in our city. Their four daughters, including my mother, were between the ages of 11 and 20.

They all went to school here and found jobs here.

My mother met my dad and started a family.

And one of their kids grew up to be the mayor of Ottawa.

That's the Canadian story. That's the way we do things in Ottawa.

In the 1970s, we welcomed the Vietnamese boat people. More recently we've opened our arms to Syrian and Ukrainian refugees.

That's the way we do things in Ottawa.

I'm really inspired to see some great work being done by Invest Ottawa and by amazing community leaders like Karla Briones to support immigrant entrepreneurs in our city.

I meet people all the time who have moved to Canada and started businesses.

But immigration is a challenging file and we've had to make some tough decisions as a city.

Over the past few years, we've had to close down community centres and recreation facilities to house new arrivals.

*Au cours des dernières années, nous avons dû fermer des centres communautaires et des installations récréatives pour loger les nouveaux arrivants.*

The team at the city is working hard to find better and more permanent solutions so we can reopen those community centres to their neighbourhoods.

That's not easy work and the decisions aren't always popular, but they're doing everything they can.

Some people have expressed concerns about some of those decisions and I respect that.

But let's never forget that we are a welcoming community. Let's never stop looking after the most vulnerable.

Let's never forget that the families and individuals who are coming to our city are our future employees, our future entrepreneurs, and our future leaders.

Let's talk a bit about the affordability crisis.

I'm very proud of the fact that we have had the lowest tax increases of any major city in Canada over the past three years.

You may have heard that Toronto is looking at a tax increase of almost 7 per cent this year. That's on top of a 9.5 per cent tax increase last year.

In Ottawa, our average tax increase over the past three years has been less than 3 per cent.

*À Ottawa, notre augmentation moyenne des impôts au cours des trois dernières années a été de moins de 3 %.*

Across the city, residents and business owners have been tightening their belts to get through the affordability crisis. We've been doing the same.

Over the past two years, we've found more than \$207 million in savings and efficiencies.

That's a 10.5 per cent tax increase that we DIDN'T pass on to our residents.

I know the other levels of government are getting ready to send each of us \$200 cheques in the next few weeks.

We're not sending out cheques, but that \$207 million is a savings of more than \$400 per household in Ottawa.

On Saturday I was skating on the canal, and a man came up to me with his family and he thanked me for saving him \$400 on his taxes. I was glad to see the impact of all the work we did.



At a time of rising costs and economic uncertainty, we simply can't add to the burden of our residents with big tax increases.

But we must continue to invest in our future. In the 2025 budget, we're investing a historic amount in public transit.

*Mais nous devons continuer à investir dans notre avenir. Dans le budget 2025, nous investissons une somme historique dans le transport en commun.*

We're hiring more than a hundred new police officers, paramedics, and firefighters.

We're investing more than \$100 million in repairing our roads and sidewalks and other critical infrastructure.

We're upgrading major arteries in the city, including Brian Coburn Boulevard in the east and Carp Road in the west.

We're putting more money toward recreation, culture, and communities, to improve quality of life for residents.

*Nous allouons davantage de fonds à la récréation, à la culture et aux communautés, pour améliorer la qualité de vie des résidents.*

We're moving forward on a new Riverside South Community Centre and Recreation Complex, and refurbishing the Alexander Community Centre.

We're investing in the new Barrhaven Town Centre civic complex.

And we're putting \$10 million toward the William Street renewal project as part of the ByWard Market Public Realm plan.

And last year we held our first rural summit in more than 15 years.

As you know, Ottawa is an enormous city, more than four and a half times the size of Toronto.

We're investing in rural roads and other solutions to support our vibrant rural communities.

Another of our biggest challenges this year will be housing.

As a community, we need to build more homes and we need to build them faster.

At the City of Ottawa, our job is not to build homes. It's to approve housing projects.

Just last week I spoke to the Greater Ottawa Homebuilders Association and I announced a new task force to streamline the approval process.

We're going to work hard to find innovative solutions.

We're going to consider as many ideas as possible to speed up the process and we're going to share our progress through a new dashboard on our website.

But there's a lot that isn't within our control. Market conditions like interest rates are a huge factor.

*Mais il y a beaucoup de choses qui échappent à notre contrôle. Les conditions du marché, comme les taux d'intérêt, sont un facteur majeur.*

Just to give you an idea: Between January 2023 and September 2024, the city approved more than 50 thousand units.

But of those 50,000 units, only 8,300 have advanced to the building permit stage.

So there are a lot of approved units that haven't been built yet.

It's not just about building more homes but building more affordable homes.

We've worked hard to secure hundreds of millions of dollars in investment from the federal and provincial governments through the Housing Accelerator Fund and the Building Faster Fund.

As a result, there are more than 1,200 new affordable units that are being built right now that will be ready for occupancy between now and 2027.

And this year, city council will make the final decision on Lansdowne Park.

This is a really important decision because Lansdowne is a huge driver of economic activity in our city.

*C'est une décision vraiment importante parce que Lansdowne est un moteur important d'activité économique dans notre ville.*

I mentioned how Hockey Canada wants to come back to Ottawa.

There are other national sports organizations that have also said they want to host more events here.

But they've been clear that they won't come back if we don't improve our aging facilities.

We won't continue to attract major events like the World Juniors and the world curling championships to Ottawa if we don't invest in Lansdowne and other facilities.

It's absolutely critical that we invest in Lansdowne because the alternative is much more expensive.

So yes, we face some big challenges. But we also have some enormous opportunities.

And I believe Team Ottawa is ready to take them on.

*Et il n'y a qu'une seule façon de répondre aux défis et de profiter des opportunités : c'est avec une approche forte, stable et équilibrée.*

There's only one way we're going to respond to the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities.

That's with a strong, stable, balanced approach where we bring people together.

That's the way we do things in Ottawa.



There are people in politics, especially right now, who see every challenge or issue as an opportunity to divide people.

They see it as a moment to drive a wedge between their allies and their enemies, to go on the attack, to force people to choose sides, to demonize people who have a different perspective.

Well, maybe this is because I'm still new to politics.

But I see these moments as an opportunity to come together, to unite people, to bring everyone together.

And here's the good news: That's already happening in our city.

I was one of the founders of the Ottawa Business Journal in 1995.

That's 30 years ago now. And so for three decades now, I've been involved in the economic development efforts for our city.

I can tell you that at no other time in the past 30 years has there been as much collaboration and coordination among the business and economic development agencies in our city as there is today.

We are led by some terrific people at some very significant organizations, including the Ottawa Board of Trade, Invest Ottawa, Ottawa Tourism, Regroupement des gens d'affaires, the Kanata North Business Association, the Ottawa Coalition of BIAs, all of our post-secondary institutions, and more.

Just last month, the Board of Trade, Invest Ottawa, and Ottawa Tourism signed a historic partnership called Ottawa Unlimited.

I was very proud and impressed to see this new level of collaboration around a shared vision and I'm excited to see the results.

There is great teamwork happening right now and it's very timely because we're going to need it in the months and years ahead.

I want to thank Sueling and the team at OBOT, the members of the board, and the leadership of all the great organizations in our city, for their hard work and collaboration.

And all of you in this room - you're all people who have chosen to be involved in the community.

You don't have to put your hand up and play a role, but you do. You do it because you care about the future of our city.

That's why I put my hand up as well.

At city hall, there's great collaboration happening as well. I promised when I ran for mayor that I would get people working together.

*J'ai promis lorsque je me suis présenté à la mairie que je ferais en sorte que les gens travaillent ensemble.*

And I've heard from a lot of residents that they've noticed a change in tone at city hall.

They're glad to see their elected officials collaborating. Even when we don't always agree, the tone is respectful.

In December, the budget passed by a vote of 22-3, with resounding support from councillors throughout the city.

We've also been working closely with our federal and provincial partners.

Yes, I've been fighting very hard and very vocally on the issue of fairness.

I've been clear about the fact that Ottawa needs our fair share of funding.

And I will never stop doing that.

*J'ai été vocal sur le fait qu'Ottawa a besoin de sa juste part de financement.*

*Et je ne cesserai jamais de le faire.*

But we are working together. We've secured more than a billion dollars in funding for Ottawa over the past two years.

And I'm hopeful that we'll have more good news to share in the coming weeks.

When I look around this room, I see a lot of leaders. I see people who have chosen to invest in and support their community.

It's the same thing I experience when I'm at the rural summit, or I'm skating on the Rideau Canal as I did on the weekend, when I'm visiting a community centre or speaking to a group of volunteers.

That inspires me to do everything I can. That gives me the energy I need to keep going.

I'm so grateful for the people of Ottawa. And I continue to be excited about our potential as a city.

Next year, Ottawa will celebrate its bicentennial. It will be 200 years since Bytown was founded.

I don't think the founders of Bytown could have imagined what we have today.

We have a lot to celebrate. We should be very grateful to the people who built this city over the last two centuries.

We also have a responsibility. We have a duty to build an even better city.

*Nous avons aussi une responsabilité. Nous avons le devoir de construire une ville encore meilleure.*

We have a duty to our children and grandchildren.

We have a duty to the people who are arriving in this city and will be the leaders of the future.

We have a responsibility to make Ottawa everything it can be.



So yes, we face some big challenges. But we can still be optimists.

We can be proud of our city. We can be inspired by its potential.

We can face these challenges and come out stronger.

We can be hopeful because we know in Ottawa, we work together.

Let's never forget how far we've come.

Let's never forget how lucky we are.

Let's never forget how much opportunity we have.

*N'oublions jamais combien d'opportunités nous avons.*

Let's never underestimate the value of bringing people together even while others are trying to drive people apart.

Let's continue to strike the right balance between supporting economic growth and showing compassion for our most vulnerable residents.

Because that's the way we do things in Ottawa.

Thank you. *Merci.*