The Vaughan Advantage

An Address by
The Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua, P.C.
Mayor, City of Vaughan
To the Vaughan Chamber of Commerce
February 16, 2011

As I look around the room, I see many of the people who have helped to make Vaughan the centre of business excellence that it is today.

Your efforts and dedication have produced an impressive business community.

As you know, this is my first time speaking to you as the Mayor of Vaughan and I want to express my gratitude again for the strong mandate I received on October 25th, 2010.

I was elected to lead one of the fastest growing municipalities in the country with a truly impressive council of dedicated men and women who are devoted to public service.

Just over a month ago I introduced the Vaughan Accord. This document – endorsed and signed by all Members of Council – ushers in a new era of respect and cooperation.

Good governance is good for business. In very clear terms, the Vaughan Accord outlines our commitment and dedication to the task of city-building.

It commits us to providing stable, transparent and effective governance, focused on achieving excellence. And it commits us to creating conditions for an economic environment which promotes innovation, productivity enhancement and job creation.
People are recognizing that the transformation of our city is well underway.

Recently I read in one of our newspapers a headline which stated “It’s a new Vaughan” - a different type of headline for our city and a recognition of our desire to bring about positive change to our city’s image.

Besides setting the tone for the next four years, I also pledged to show leadership in the area of fiscal responsibility.

During my years as Chair of the House of Commons Finance Committee, I advanced a national economic agenda which focused on the elimination of the deficit, paying down the debt, lowering taxes and respecting the taxpayers hard-earned dollars.

Those core values will never change and I bring them with me in my new role as Mayor. Those values have already been put into action.

We have taken the first step to demonstrate fiscal responsibility by freezing the salaries of Council.

The next step is to establish the framework for a Program Review this year. This is a new way of budget-making in Vaughan and an innovation that I know will be welcomed.

This review will ask a series of questions, including:

Is the expenditure still in the public interest?
Is it affordable given our financial situation?
And, how does the service fit with the publics’ priorities?
We are determined to make the choices necessary to respond to the challenges and opportunities we face today and will face tomorrow.

The Vaughan Accord and the Program Review – these are all part of my goal to take Vaughan to the next level – creating a city with a higher purpose.
Vaughan is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. In 1991 the town of Vaughan was designated a city. At that time, our population stood at just over 111,000.

Today, 20 years later, we have nearly tripled that as our population approaches 300,000. And in another 20 years, it is expected that we will surpass 418,000.

We are growing and the City of Vaughan will be transformed – emerging from a suburban community into a major urban centre which we will turn into a world class city.

And we have The Vaughan Advantage to help us achieve it.

We have location and accessibility to world markets.

How many cities can claim to be within a 20 minute drive of the country’s busiest airport? Or say that their highways provide access to more than 155 million American and Canadian consumers within a one-day’s drive?

How many cities can say they not only have excellent highway accessibility, with the 407, 400 and 427, but are building for the future with the 427 extension, the subway extension and bus rapidways?

How many cities can claim to have a diverse population where residents speak over 70 different languages?

Or where nearly one-third are university educated?

How many cities in York Region and the GTA can claim to have consistently one of the lowest property taxes while providing high quality service to its residents?

How many cities our size can claim to have close to 200 million dollars in reserves, giving our city the financial stability to withstand economic downturns and putting the city in a better position to address such issues as infrastructure repair and replacement?
Vaughan can because we are a city of choice. We have more than 9,000 businesses in our city.

We’re home to the Canadian or World headquarters of more than 60 major companies. And that number keeps growing.

We are a city that encourages innovation and opportunity, and welcomes new business investment. The entrepreneurial spirit is very strong here, and we have no shortage of corporate pioneers.

Earlier today I attended the Vaughan Business Enterprise Centre’s Annual Business Expo.

VBEC provides support for would-be and existing business owners.

In fact, VBEC helped business owners create over 1,000 jobs in 2010.

We care about our small business community.

Our diverse economic base has allowed us to successfully weather the international economic challenges of the past two years.

And we are poised for even greater success.

For more than a decade, Vaughan has been among the country’s leaders when it comes to growth and investment.

Millions of dollars are invested in our community every day.

In 2010, Vaughan achieved its second highest level of investment ever – 1.4 billion dollars in building permits.

It is a major accomplishment to break the billion dollar mark in construction activity eight out of the last 10 years.

And what is even more significant is that this was achieved given the still fragile state of the global economic recovery.
We’re getting it right. How do I know this? Because investment is growing in the business sector.

The level of commercial and industrial construction alone increased by 79 per cent from the year before.

Our hospitality sector continued to expand, adding more than 240 new jobs and this year, two new hotels, which began construction last year, will open – Hilton Homewood Suites and Marriot Spring Hill Suites.

We welcomed Saputo Foods, which relocated to Vaughan, bringing 120 new jobs. And we welcomed new head offices – BFI Canada, Easton’s Group of Hotels and Longo’s, altogether adding more than 400 new jobs.

And it doesn’t stop there. Institutional construction increased to over 210 million dollars in 2010.

This increase represents a major investment in rapid transit infrastructure, as work begins on the construction of the Highway 407 Subway Station, one of six stations being built along the 8.6 kilometre extension of the Spadina Subway.

Investment leads to job creation.

However, the world is changing and the competition for business and for jobs is real. We must be better.

In order to continue to attract all forms of development in Vaughan, we must position the City in a regional, national and international context.

This is already being done.

The City of Vaughan signed a Letter of Intent with Changning District in China. The signing paves the way for our two cities to explore future business relationships.

It is vital that Vaughan maintain a competitive advantage in today’s global economy. As a City we are reaching out to residents and businesses, to the media
and academic institutions and other levels of governments to foster a greater presence of the City within the circles of decision-makers.

We must project the real strengths and potential of our community.

Vibrant cities and regions undergo a process of continuous renewal.

The new world economy calls for new approaches, new ideas and new directions for economic prosperity and a sustainable future.

Vaughan is already in a strong economic position.

The Conference Board of Canada singled Vaughan out as having one of top two performing economies in the country and one of only three cities to earn an “A” grade for a strong economy.

We have what it takes to be a leader. However, we must be forward thinking in our approach and have an Economic Development Strategy. And we do.

The Strategy has four key goals:

- We must position Vaughan as the gateway for economic activity in the Greater Toronto Area
- We must develop Vaughan as the incubator of entrepreneurial activity for the economic region
- We must provide best-in-class economic development services
- And we must continue to grow Vaughan’s dynamic quality of place and creative economy.

We need to work together to firmly establish Vaughan as a major gateway for goods, services and people flowing into and out of the GTA.

Being a gateway will bring opportunity to Vaughan but the real work will be in keeping it here.

We will use the entire City to attract, nurture and grow the next generation of economic activities for the region.
We’re already seeing some of that in the growth of the Green Industry in Vaughan, particularly in the solar industry.

We have 12 solar manufacturers and distributors in our City and that number is growing.

By focusing our economic development efforts we will be successful in attracting and encouraging investment which will impact the shape and direction of economic development in specific areas of the City.

These include the Vaughan Enterprise Zone, where developing transportation infrastructure and desirable development lands support the growth of the Advanced Goods Production and Movement sector.

We are good at manufacturing and good at transportation, now we need to raise the bar.
We must move beyond the traditional products and way of doing things and change for the future.

Every great City also has a place where people come together – a centre, a core. This is our new downtown area, the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre.

Recognition is growing and it’s now being viewed as one of the main office development areas in the GTA.

Here our growing cultural, transit and educational amenities will help anchor a quality of life that supports the growth of the Innovative Research, Development and Design sector.

Above and beyond transportation links such as the Spadina Subway extension, and locational advantages, you can expect that Vaughan will leverage all its strengths to become the gateway to the Greater Toronto economic region.

Economic growth and prosperity occurs without regard to municipal boundaries.

It’s a global marketplace now and Vaughan will focus on international business development by working with cities who can open Vaughan up to other international markets.
We will focus on innovation and research in the bio and life sciences sector for the development of the Vaughan Health Campus of Care.

We will build a community that serves everyone. We have the talent here to do it and we know that entrepreneurial communities happen because of smart and innovative people.

Over the next ten years, as the City implements the Strategy’s Action Plan, it will pursue an ambitious – and “best-in-class” – approach to economic growth, investment attraction and job creation.

We will grow Vaughan’s dynamic quality of place and creative economy by –

attracting knowledge workers;
by cultivating tourism, cultural and creative industries;
by protecting the economic vitality of our core communities – Concord, Kleinburg, Maple, Thornhill and Woodbridge;
and by leveraging our image as a welcoming community.

We will form a range of key partnerships that will help the City drive the economic agenda forward.

As I stated in my inaugural address on December 6th,

As your mayor I have a vision for the future of the city.

I see a City that will be praised for its character and integrity.

A City that will be acclaimed for its responsible, sustainable planning and economic leadership.

A City that will be renowned for its first class administration, its transparency, its accountability and respect for the hard-earned taxpayers dollars.
A City that will inspire an era of cultural splendor bringing about a renaissance that will promote sports, the arts, music, theatre and architectural excellence, beautifying its landscape while nourishing its spirit.

A City that will exercise a leadership role well beyond its borders, contributing its ideas, intellectual capacity and sharing its knowledge widely.

A City with a downtown core that will become an expression of modernity and avant garde thinking inspiring people from everywhere to admire its sophistication and experience its vibrancy.

A City where people from all over the world, speaking 70 different languages, view their diversity as a unifying strength and a defining characteristic of their citizenship.

A City willing to get out of its comfort zone, willing to innovate, take on challenges driven by the knowledge that history does not reward those who play it safe.

This will be Vaughan’s new image.

Today I stand before you, confident to confirm that the state of our city is strong and our future looks bright.

This is The Vaughan Advantage.