



Mayor Collier, Town of Ajax

Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade Address

March 21, 2019

**Check against delivery*

Good morning, and thank you all for being here. I'd like to start off by saying a big thank you to our gracious hosts at the Ajax Pickering Board of Trade for putting on yet another fantastic event, and to the staff at Ajax Convention Centre for your service and hospitality.

Wow! It's a lot different being on this side of the podium. It's been 23 years since Ajax last changed Mayors, and I'm so excited to be here addressing you for the first time as the 10th Mayor of the Town of Ajax. Having spent almost my whole life in Ajax, being tasked and trusted with its leadership is truly a personal dream come true.

I want to acknowledge and thank Ajax Council in attendance today – Regional Councillors Marilyn Crawford, Sterling Lee and Joanne Dies; and local Councillors Rob Tyler Morin, Ash Khan and Lisa Bower. We also have several people here representing Town of Ajax staff, notably Shane Baker, CAO; Dave Meredith, Director of Planning and Economic Development; Lisa Hausz, Andrew Poray, Nadia Sukovski, Judy Wight, Jack Mamo, Kevin Tryon, Tracey Vaughan, Robert Gruber, Rachael Wraith and Rachael Matheson. I want to thank you for being here, and for all that you do to keep Ajax moving forward every day.

These are exciting times! Ajax has a new Mayor, a substantially new Council, a new CAO and a new Acting Director of Planning. Our new Council vision puts economic development as the highest priority. Not only attracting new investment but supporting and encouraging existing businesses and doing everything we can to create an environment for success. To this end, I have started my business outreach program and my goal is to meet personally with every employer in Ajax this term of Council. So far, I've personally held more than 20 meetings with businesses large and small including OPG, SAFRAN, Volkswagen, East Penn, prominent landowners like the Picov family, regional businesses and post-secondary institutions, as well as with the Board of Trade. We have also brought the Consul-General of Japan in Toronto to Ajax to experience first-hand our diverse range of businesses, large and small.

At these meetings I'm bringing our economic development team and the message is clear, Ajax is open for business. These staff that I introduced earlier, they are here to assist you, so use them. If you encounter any issues in dealing with the Town, our Council's commitment is to do everything that

we can to find a solution and help your business grow. You are our partners. We need to build that relationship and work together so that everyone will benefit.

Speaking of relationships, it's long overdue that we mend fences with our neighbours and work together. Regional Chair John Henry said in his inaugural speech that, "we need to leave our egos at the door," and he's absolutely right. I committed during the APBOT Mayoral debates that I would work towards rebuilding our relationship with Pickering and I made this intention very clear to Mayor Ryan as well. I'm very happy to say that the relationship between Ajax and Pickering is stronger today than it has been in many years and I look forward to continuing to build on this foundation as we break down silos and support prosperity for all of Durham Region.

2018 was an interesting year. We had a provincial election in June and Rod Phillips, now the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, was elected. This was during a time of uncertainty as we awaited the decision on the slots at Casino Ajax. Post-provincial election, Minister Phillips announced that a two-casino solution was available; which has seen Casino Ajax increasing the number of slots on their site in the short term and evaluating next steps upon completion of Durham Live. I am satisfied with this outcome, as I know that each site's target market is different and I'm confident that the two-site solution will be viable long into the future. This is also great news for the quarter horse industry at Ajax Downs, who are celebrating their 50th anniversary in Ajax this year. We couldn't be happier for them.

I want to add a quick plug for Family Fun Day, held at the track in support of the Ajax-Pickering Hospital Foundation each year. This event is celebrating a milestone 10th anniversary in 2019 so stay tuned for more details... but I have heard that this is going to be the best year yet – no pressure, Tracy! I encourage you all to attend.

With respect to Casino Ajax, I know you've heard it before but I'd like to reiterate that responsibly managed slots revenues – approximately \$7.5 million/year in non-tax revenue – has allowed the Town to strategically bring forward capital projects like splash pads, parks, and municipal buildings such as the Audley Rec Centre phases 1&2, fire headquarters, our operations centre, two new fire trucks as well as key equipment and vehicle purchases. At the same time, we were able to avoid an approximate 1% tax increase per year through debt avoidance.

In September, Ajax's newest civic space opened at Pat Bayly Square. The fountain-turned-ice rink was so highly anticipated that it's been in use every day it's been cold enough to skate this season, drawing people from near and far for some wintertime fun and to take advantage of all Ajax has to offer. I love the story of that space – the nod to our history in a space designed for our future. Pat Bayly Square coupled with Medallion's Vision at Pat Bayly Square brings diverse business opportunities in the Region's largest mixed-use development. Phase 1 recently received a \$60 million low-interest loan from the federal government to help residents secure 308 safe, accessible and affordable homes. Tower B is expected to open for occupancy this summer.

I want to give a personal shout out to my friend Rana and the SJ71 team for their success with the G Centre. The 30-office co-working space in Ajax's downtown is already at capacity. This is a real testament to the strength of the growing business community and the prevalence of entrepreneurship in Durham Region.

Then of course we had the municipal election in October which kept some of us extremely busy. 2018 was a very hectic, but successful year and the Town of Ajax's 2018 commercial and industrial investment was just over \$71 million.

Going forward - we have a completely reconfigured Council, full of fresh ideas. We are on course to reset, refocus and reprioritize.

Ajax Council is in the process of passing our 2019 operating budget and I'm sure most people here know that this year's tax increase is significant at 4.75%. For many years we have enjoyed status quo budgets in the neighbourhood of 2.75%. While these minor adjustments may have been more popular, they have not been keeping up with our growth. This Council is committed to raising the bar with regards to service delivery and have uncovered many areas where we have fallen behind. I took on the budget Chair role personally this year because I knew that this budget may not be popular, and I'll take responsibility for that. We need to invest in our community and my commitment to Ajax residents and businesses is that they are going to clearly see the value that they're getting for those extra tax dollars. We are also investigating several non-tax revenue streams. Kudos to Mayor Ryan and Pickering Council on your very successful non-tax revenue naming rights program, it's on my list but you beat us to the punch so well done. It's my goal for this year to be a budget reset and then maintain going forward.

We need to address processing and approval delays in our planning department. We are hiring additional staff to allow us to expedite plans examination and building permits.

I'm a big believer in the broken window theory and we need to do better when it comes to fostering community pride. I am initiating a war on litter, and several of the new hires are dedicated solely to litter cleanup. You'll also see Council pitching in personally to support community cleanup initiatives.

We're hiring another gardener and several more seasonal staff for playground and trail maintenance, horticulture, planting bed maintenance and sportsfields maintenance.

We are hiring a dedicated grant and marketing coordinator whose sole duty is to research and apply for federal and provincial grants. This person should pay for themselves many times over.

There are several other new hires, 18 in total, and our goal is to raise the bar in Ajax across the board in maintenance and service delivery.

Our economic development and planning team is engaged and focused. Using tools like PriorityPATH Prime – the Town’s unique, streamlined development approvals process, we’re able to prioritize and expedite applications. A recent example of its success is under construction right now. Utilizing PriorityPATH Prime, we were able to facilitate Gordon Foods Service’s aggressive build schedule, cutting the red tape for new businesses in Ajax.

Gordon Foods have brought a \$50 M investment to Ajax for a 600-employee, 330,000 sq. ft. state-of-the-art facility. These are good-paying, local jobs. If anyone has been by their Ringer Rd. site, construction is well underway and we are looking forward to celebrating their grand opening very soon.

I’ve spoken of new planning staff coming on board to assist with ensuring timely approvals for business. I’ve also been working closely with our dedicated planning team to find timely solutions to reduce delays. We are using every tool available to us in order to ensure that we are the best partners to business that we can be. We want investment, we want to build our commercial tax base, we want to promote grown-in-Ajax success stories, and we are making that our focus.

We are already seeing success in attracting new investment and 2019 is starting out strong. Applications so far include;

- The final dealership and collision centre at Lakeridge Auto Park
- Sun City 240,000 ft business park
- The new Salvation Army building on Kings Crescent
- A Fairfield/Marriot Hotel and 30,000 ft convention centre, 100 jobs
- Phases 3&4 of the Medallion Vision development
- I spoke of the G Centre, SJ71 is completing the G Plaza, 15,000 ft of office space, not completed yet already 50% rented.
- KPC Power moving to Ajax, High voltage service company bringing 65 jobs
- Best Western Hotel and convention centre on Harwood Avenue
- Ajax Council opted in for retail cannabis and a location is scheduled to open in the Durham Centre on Hwy 2.

This is just the start! My goal is to see 5,000 new jobs in Ajax by 2022 and our Council is prepared to do everything we can to make this happen. Ajax has a young, highly-educated, diverse workforce that is tired of commuting to Toronto.

How are we going to deliver such an ambitious target? I have 4 primary steps:

1. Ensure town-wide processes and policies are focused on job creation and facilitation. PriorityPATH helped to set the stage, now we need to enhance and expand our solutions-based approach.
2. Superior business retention and expansion service to help our existing businesses grow and add jobs. If each of our businesses add just one job, we will add 2000 jobs to the local community.
3. Unlock our job creation potential by working with the Region and other levels of government to increase service capacity in our designated intensification areas and significant employment areas, especially our Downtown and Central Employment areas.
4. Support for entrepreneur and start-up community, particularly in the areas of new technology.

Technology is our future and a big part of my election campaign was to create an innovation hub right here in Ajax. I see this as both an incubator supporting start-ups but also an accelerator to assist existing companies to get to the next level with their product. We are working closely with partners across the Region and the GTHA including businesses, not-for-profits and post-secondary institutions to bring our vision of an Ajax-based technology incubator to life. Expect more exciting news on this project in the near future.

Speaking of the Innovation Hub, please hold the morning of April 10 in your calendars for an Ajax Business Network Event - Artificial Intelligence 101 for Business. If you've ever been curious about AI and its potential applications for your business, this is the event for you. We are also proud to be supporting the Enable AI Summit at Durham College coming in June, along with a technology learning series later this year. More details to come.

With a strong focus on economic development this term, a new strategic plan is being prepared to provide specific benchmarks and best practices to address challenges and ensure we are moving forward with business in mind.

Everyone wants to feel like they work, live and play in a safe community. Our team has built a strong rapport in communication and coordination with our community safety partners including DRPS, service providers and school boards. In order to improve overall community safety, each Councillor has been briefed on the issues impacting their wards, and the Town enjoys an open line of communication with Inspector Haskins and his team. I'm happy to announce that, after nearly a decade long hiring freeze, yesterday Regional Finance approved the DRPS budget which includes 24 new front-line officers. I will continue to promote a police station here in Ajax, but this is a great first step.

Speeding and red-light running are serious issues and we are focused on improving traffic calming measures to reduce speeding in the areas most at risk of a collision. I have advocated for a red-light

camera pilot project in partnership with the Region of Durham and Council has approved the use of unmanned speed enforcement which was allowed with changes to the Highway Traffic Act last year. We are also looking at building more pedestrian-friendly, multi-use developments.

I've served for 8 years on Durham Regional Transit and this term I have been appointed Chair of DRT. In an effort to learn more about the system and seek improvements and efficiencies I have embarked on Shaun's Excellent DRT Adventure. Those in this room born prior to 1980 should get that reference. I've been taking transit to and from different locations all over the Region and will continue for a couple more weeks. We will continue to improve the service and hopefully get more people out of their cars and into transit as this is the only way that we will address our growing gridlock problem. This year some of the DRT service improvements include; 3,284 additional service hours to expand routes and increase frequency, increased specialized service and I'm very happy to announce an initiative that I have been promoting for a long time, children under 12 ride free with a paid adult starting May 1. We are still investigating expanding the Access Pass to those with low income and it is my goal to get high school students off the yellow busses and back on DRT by partnering with the school boards with a reduced fare student pass. Stay tuned.

If you haven't been in to see it yet, the Quaker Meeting House has been restored and improved, with accessibility features added. It was officially opened to public bookings earlier this month. Brought to life by a partnership between the Town and the Masons, the project was made possible by assistance from the federal government's Canada 150 Community Infrastructure Fund. We are excited to make this asset available for public use, connecting our future to even more of our storied history.

On June 15 this year I will be hosting the inaugural Ajax Mayor's Gala. We have an amazing committee co-chaired by my beautiful wife, Rose Collier. I'm not going to give away the details but please mark your calendars as the committee is working very hard to create a premiere event that's going to blow you away!

Finally, I will be continuing my tradition of community outreach and public consultation with Live with Mayor Collier which kicks off next Wednesday March 27 at 7 p.m. at Ajax Council Chambers. This will not be your traditional town hall and my staff have come up with some innovative, fun ideas to make this first of four series truly dynamic. Please join me in person, online or via social media.

I'll end it there. Thank you for the opportunity to come and speak about Ajax, our successes and our vision for improvements. Please remember that you can catch me any time on Facebook, Twitter, email or phone. I look forward to your feedback and suggestions.

Thank you.