

Mayor Gregor Robertson

Inauguration Address

December 5, 2011



*Welcome. Let me begin with our deep thanks to the Coast Salish people. We are gathered today in their territory, and we are grateful.*

*And we have the good luck today to be basking in the afterglow of a BC Lions Grey Cup victory . . . and a rare streak of December sunshine.*

*There's a crispness in the air that focuses the attention, and maybe dissipates a little of the heat of the election campaign. So we all have a chance to reflect a little more clearly on the contributions of our outgoing colleagues, before we say goodbye.*

*Suzanne Anton said it very well a few weeks ago, when she said that politics is anything but a thankless job. There's a real reward in making a positive difference for your neighbours, and for the city.*

*But I know there's sacrifice as well. To our outgoing elected leaders - you've given this city a tremendous gift: your time, your dedication and the very best of yourselves. And to all of you, on behalf of the city, thank you.*

*I want to express Vancouver's gratitude to our outgoing City Councillors, School Board Trustees and Parks Board Commissioners.*

*I'd especially like to thank Suzanne Anton, David Cadman, George Chow, and Ellen Woodsworth for their service. You've all served Vancouver over several terms of office and this was invaluable. I know we'll hear more from all of you in new ways over the coming years.*

*Today is also a chance to say hello and welcome to the newcomers to Council and the School and Park Boards. The voters have given our Council new voices in Adriane Carr, Elizabeth Ball, George Affleck and Tony Tang.*

*I don't think I've given a speech in the past four months without mentioning Tony at least twice - and I'm glad this one won't be an exception.*

*We're here today in one of Vancouver's newest and most exciting places, the former athletes' village for the 2010 Winter Games - and the Creekside Community Recreation Centre.*

*Like so many of Vancouver's most special places, it came about because of collaboration.*

*Vancouver has been built by people from diverse backgrounds, interests and points of view, working together for the common good.*

*The willingness to reach across gaps of difference, to find common ground and common purpose: that's one of our greatest strengths.*

*The people of Vancouver practice it every day. And you expect nothing less from your politicians.*

*You know that we have different opinions, and you expect us to express those differences honestly. You expect us to listen to those differences and respect them. And you expect us to work together effectively, in good faith.*

*That means acknowledging that we can learn from each other, and from the community.*

*And it means trying new things - without rejecting them out of hand simply for being new. A changing city calls for new ideas and innovative solutions. And Vancouver is a changing city.*

*Just a few years ago, almost unnoticed, we passed a remarkable threshold. For the first time since the founding of this city, the majority of our people have a mother tongue that is something other than English.*

*And whether that's Cantonese, Tagalog, Mandarin, Punjabi, French, Japanese, Spanish, Korean, Hindi or any of the scores of languages you'll hear today on Vancouver's streets . . . it means a sea change for this city.*

*This is a much different city from the one I grew up in - a more diverse, more confident city. One that looks out onto the world with an eye to opportunity, and looks to the future with optimism.*

*But it's also a city facing challenges: how we manage our environmental footprint in one of the most beautiful natural settings on earth. How we fight poverty and homelessness in the midst of great wealth and development.*

*How we keep our neighbourhoods safe and vibrant when faced with relentless growth pressures. How we ensure that the next generation of Vancouverites will find this a city where they can afford to learn, live, work, and raise families of their own.*

*Those challenges are finding a voice in many ways, and from many quarters. And whether it's through community groups and non-profits, through protest, through vocal businesses, or the day-to-day conversations people are having, there's a new civic vitality emerging in this city.*

*We were elected on a platform that speaks to these concerns. And it's our responsibility to engage with those voices in an open, constructive way.*

*During the past 3 years, we battled a global recession and laid a lot of groundwork for positive change. And over the next 3 years we will build on it.*

*While many other cities are still struggling around the world, Vancouver has the opportunity to lead. To blaze a new path of innovation. We will take the ideas, ingenuity and foresight of Vancouver's people, and translate them into action.*

*Our vision includes making this city a city where people can afford to live.*

*Tonight, new shelters will be open, thanks to an agreement we reached on Friday with the BC government. Yes, there was disagreement about how best to proceed - but our partnership has remained strong for 3 tough budget years. And it doesn't matter whose name is on the shelters, as long as the doors are open and the beds are warm and safe.*

*The organizations that keep those doors open are doing some of the most urgent and critical work in this city. And it's inspiring how dedicated our staff at the city and at BC Housing have been to make that possible.*

*But we know shelters aren't homes. Only a larger, sustainable supply of low-income housing will keep this city on track to meet a goal that means more to many of us than any other.*

*This council may have its political differences, but I trust that we are united in our conviction that in a city this prosperous, nobody should ever be forced to sleep on the streets. And we recommit to ending street homelessness in the city of Vancouver by 2015.*

*But affordability is a much broader issue. My wife Amy and I have conversations late into the night, just like many parents do. We wonder, will this be a place our kids and their friends can afford to live?*

*The answer must be an emphatic yes. And over the next 3 years, we will focus the resources and tools of city hall on our affordable housing and homelessness plan.*

*And today, I can announce I am striking a task force on housing affordability, including advocates, architects, developers, building owners, and financiers. They'll identify ways we can increase Vancouver's supply of affordable homes - both immediately, for the most urgent needs, and for the long term.*

*Can City Hall solve our affordability crisis by itself, in 3 years? No. But we're not powerless. And over the next term, this council will take action.*

*Of course, tackling affordability needs to be in concert with creating jobs in a dynamic, resilient economy.*

*Our vision includes creating good-paying jobs in our diverse array of industries. We'll work to keep taxes low and support small business. We'll invest in our creative economy, protecting artist spaces and creating new studio space for our cultural entrepreneurs. And we'll promote Vancouver as a world-leading destination for people and investment.*

*We will start with my commitment to ensuring that Vancouver hosts a new investment summit early next year.*

*We will bring together hundreds of investors, entrepreneurs, and urban leaders from here and around the world, to focus on the business of city-building.*

*We'll bring in investment to develop our local businesses - and we'll also help those entrepreneurs find opportunities in overseas markets.*

*Our city is a model for the world on sustainable urban development. We need to not only showcase that global leadership, but put it to work to strengthen our local economy.*

*Our vision also includes the safe, liveable neighbourhoods that we all love so deeply. Over the next 3 years, we will make this city friendlier to Vancouver's families- from securing at least 500 new child care spaces for our youngest residents, to providing new facilities and staff training to support our eldest.*

*We will start by enabling selective free programming at community centres, so your family's financial means don't stand in the way of enjoying the health and recreational opportunities that Vancouver offers.*

*Our vision includes making Vancouver the world's greenest city by 2020. During the last Council's term, the people of Vancouver came together in historic numbers to help chart a collaborative strategy, the Greenest City Action Plan.*

*Over the next 3 years, we will implement that plan, with a scope that includes 85 separate initiatives . . . and ranges from new green spaces . . . to local food . . . to creating green jobs . . . to better clean transportation options.*

*And we start by working with TransLink to secure the improved late-night bus and train service that our whole region needs urgently. And continuing to push for rapid transit along the Broadway corridor.*

*An agenda this ambitious can't be the work of Council alone. We will draw on the strength of our community organizations, of business and labour and social profits, and the ingenuity and direct involvement of the people of Vancouver.*

*We do that by finding new opportunities and venues for citizens to participate, new ways for the city to listen, new forums for conversation.*

*We do that by opening our doors, both physical and virtual. One way we've started is by opening up Vancouver's data and new technology.*

*Right now you can see that in simple things that make everyday life a little easier . . . like a web app that gives you updates by text message or Twitter to let you know when garbage day is, and what waste will get collected.*

*Now we want to do more. And with measures ranging from a new city app . . . to making the city's information and data more accessible using 311 . . . we want to bring City Hall as close to you as the nearest laptop, public terminal or smartphone.*

*And we will continue pushing for real reform of Vancouver's election process - including donation limits and disclosure.*

*Our work agenda begins today. And this winter will be busy. But I have great faith in this city, and in this Council.*

*There is talent and goodwill from all sides.*

*The people of this city want us to put that talent and goodwill to work on their behalf. And they fully expect us to work together.*

*The people of Vancouver know it can be easy to tear down or criticize, and tougher to create and build. But they also know that isn't how you embrace the future.*

*They know that future belongs to those who have the courage to try new things, and yes, to admit mistakes. But also to persevere in the face of setbacks and difficulty.*

*I had the privilege of honouring former Mayor Art Phillips last term for his service to the city. 40 years ago, he told us this in his inaugural address:*

*"The citizens of Vancouver and other major cities across Canada now realize that progress can't be measured in the height of buildings or in the amount of pavement."*

*That idea is now at the core of how this city sees itself. Our people know that Vancouver's bright future relies on our compassion for each other, on our commitment to all those who come next, and on our determination to succeed together.*

*That's the strength of this city. That's the message and the mission we have all been given by the people we serve.*

*And that's the mandate we all accept today, with our gratitude to the people of the great city of Vancouver.*

*Thank you.*

- *Gregor Robertson*