

Mayor Gregor Robertson

Inauguration Address

December 8, 2014



*Thank you all for joining us today.*

*We are grateful to be gathered on Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil Waututh territory, and we offer our thanks to the Coast Salish people.*

*I want to offer my thanks to the outgoing Council, School Board and Parks Board.*

*And to those who are returning, or joining us for the first time, congratulations. You face very big challenges, but you're taking on one of the most important jobs public life has to offer. And I'm looking forward to working with you all.*

*As we look forward to the next four years, it's worth reflecting on how far Vancouver has come in the past six.*

*Six years ago, this city took up some of the great challenges of our time. Climate change and sustainability. Homelessness. Urban affordability. And Vancouver rose to those challenges, coming together with energy, ingenuity and will: sharing insight and offering solutions.*

*These have been six years of change. Of achievement, but also of hard work. We've asked a lot of each other.*

*And I am so very proud that when the time came to choose whether to continue on this path, the people of Vancouver came out in larger numbers than we've seen in a dozen years.*

*Humbled because I recognize that mandate as a challenge to all of us. And it's one worthy of this city.*

*Far from rejecting a bold progressive vision, the people of Vancouver made it clear they are confident in the agenda we have pursued.*

*This is a city confident in its mantle of leadership, a mantle global in scope and reach.*

*Not just confident. Hungry for us to do more, and to do better.*

*I am grateful for that vote of confidence. And I intend to work my hardest over the next four years to demonstrate that we've heard that call.*

*It will take work, and it will take an openness to the ideas, perspectives and voices of every member of Council.*

*I'm proud of the Vision platform, but there are solid, innovative ideas that the Green Party advanced in the campaign. The NPA offered ideas to improve transparency that merit attention. COPE may not have an elected voice on Council, but the principles and values they advocated will.*

*Every one of your new and returning councillors has valuable skills and experience to offer. And we owe it to the people who elected us to put those skills and experience to work on their behalf, on everything from affordable homes and a greener city to creating new artist spaces, protecting heritage and supporting local businesses.*

*When we do, we'll be able to count on the dedicated women and men who work for this city. Being able to count on their commitment—their professionalism—their pride in the work they do and the city they serve—is one of the great pleasures of public service in Vancouver.*

*And so is engaging with the communities we serve. A responsive, effective city must be open both to established voices, and also to those who speak from the margins.*

*We've done much to make this a more open and inclusive city. Innovative approaches to consultation and dialogue. Embracing communities and taking the lead in advancing human rights issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. Addressing historic wounds and divisions.*

*But we all know we must do better.*

*We will continue to call on all of Vancouver to join the conversations about the tough issues. But more than that, let's challenge each other to do better and do more to knit our community together. To volunteer, to check in on a neighbour, to express our love for this city and each other in actions large and small.*

*We are stronger when we work together, wiser when we listen to each other. And we will need that strength and wisdom to tackle the challenges of the next four years with confidence.*

*That's important not just for Vancouver, but for all of Canada.*

*Our country is waking up to the importance of our nation's cities. Last weekend, I joined 52,000 fans in BC Place to watch the Grey Cup.*

*And three of those fans were the mayors of Calgary, Edmonton and Winnipeg.*

*The way things are going, I may have the pleasure of inviting a few more of Canada's mayors to Vancouver in June for a Stanley Cup final.*

*Strong, dynamic, vibrant cities drive our economy. They power innovation—commercial, social and cultural. They move our country forward.*

*The priorities we've set out for Vancouver are shared by every city in Canada. And those priorities must carry far more weight at every level of government.*

*Next year's federal election is an opportunity to push the cities agenda onto centre stage. And I'll be joining mayors across the country to do just that.*

*Our economic fundamentals are strong, with declining debt, low taxes, and surging investment in construction and new office towers.*

*But it's the innovation economy in Vancouver that is taking off, from technology to start-ups to digital media to medical research. World-beating companies growing at home and top-tier talent setting up shop from abroad.*

*Indeed, the innovation economy is thriving in urban centres across Canada, and we need to elevate the awareness coast to coast of how important Canadian cities are to our economic well-being.*

*The next four years provide great opportunity for our city, but they also pose challenges. And to keep moving forward, we have to face our challenges head-on.*

*And there is no challenge that is closer to my heart, that has a greater claim on our moral determination, than ending street homelessness.*

*We'll continue to work closely with our federal and provincial counterparts—both to meet the urgent needs of impending winter, and to address longer-term issues including mental health and addiction.*

*Let me repeat something I've said many times before: Ending homelessness isn't an aspiration, or a rhetorical flourish. In a city as wealthy as Vancouver, it's a non-negotiable responsibility for every one of us.*

*But it's only one facet of poverty, and we must pursue our work for a fairer, more inclusive city on many fronts.*

*One of the most pressing is that of child poverty.*

*Just a few days ago, The Tyee posted an article by a schoolteacher named Anna Chudnovsky. She wrote about one of her students, growing up with a single mom who's trying her very best, but still just barely getting by.*

*She talks about teaching him math: "We're working on adding with regrouping. His family is in utter crisis and he's trying to carry the one."*

*If he can keep trying to carry the one, we can at least pay attention to the numbers, too. Like the 1 in 5 children entering kindergarten in Vancouver who come from low-income families*

*I know we won't change that overnight—but that should never stop us from doing what we can.*

*Which is why I'm committed to working with the School Board to double the size of the board's breakfast program, to help feed more vulnerable kids every morning.*

*Will it end poverty? No. But for many more children, it will mean their growing bodies start every school day with a full stomach. And for many of them, that can make all the difference.*

*As anyone who pays bills in Vancouver knows, though, you don't have to be living in poverty to find it hard to make ends meet.*

*Affordability has to be front and centre on our agenda. The citizens who contributed to the affordability task force developed a wide range of recommendations that we'll be adopting in the coming months.*

*One of the most important is recognizing the need for housing solutions between the tower and the single-family dwelling.*

*If we want affordable homes, if we want vibrant communities, then Vancouver needs to build more townhouses and row houses. We need to build more low-rises and mid-rises.*

*They can help to give us the mix of housing that creates affordable options across the housing spectrum.*

*And we'll move forward with our new Affordable Housing Agency, using city-owned land to deliver affordable homes for families with modest incomes.*

*Homes for purchase. And a dramatic increase in the number of homes to rent, at affordable rates.*

*Families renting homes in Vancouver deserve a better option than paying palace-sized rents on postage-stamp apartments.*

*Yes, rising prices are a consequence of growth and prosperity. Affordability is a non-stop challenge in a city like ours. But that doesn't mean we have to allow working and middle-class families to be priced out of town.*

*Or accept that our emerging artists and creative entrepreneurs should look elsewhere for putting down roots*

*We are only succeeding, our communities are only thriving, when people from all backgrounds can afford to call this great city home.*

*You know, one of the things I hear again and again from people is how proud they are that our city has taken such a position of global leadership on climate and sustainability.*

*And however green our laurels may be, Vancouver isn't about to sit on them.*

*The coming year will be pivotal worldwide for climate commitments. Cities like Vancouver have to speak out, and lead.*

*We will hold firm on our stand to protect our shorelines and our waterways, and to oppose plans that would send a surge of oil tankers through our waters.*

*We're helping to spark a national conversation about how we pursue a strong, prosperous economy in tandem with a commitment to clean energy.*

*And we'll continue to support innovation in clean energy and green technologies. These sectors are already creating well-paying jobs for Vancouverites. They're the sectors poised for explosive growth in the years and decades ahead.*

*This city's sustainability and livability owe a great debt to some bold, visionary decisions of the past. Early in our history, creating Stanley Park. In the 1970s, choosing the community of Strathcona over an eight-lane expressway.*

*We face such a decision today, and it's no less far-reaching in determining our livability and prosperity for decades to come.*

*It's the decision to move forward with a Broadway Subway.*

*The Broadway corridor has become Vancouver's economic, educational, technological and cultural aorta. Congestion has been building for years, and half measures won't begin to cut it.*

*A subway is the single best thing we can do for our environment and our economy.*

*And let me repeat what I have said before: I am determined that this will not be cut-and-cover construction. And it won't turn the Broadway streetscape into a wall of glass towers.*

*We're going to do this right: respecting the character of our communities, and allowing businesses and residents to continue with their lives with a minimum of disruption.*

*But there's a hurdle to cross first, and it's a big one: the region-wide referendum that's coming in only a few months.*

*There's no point in debating the fairness of a referendum that road construction never seems to require. It's coming. And it means our city and our region face a critical moment.*

*I will work with Mayors throughout the region to build public support for better transit. And I want to be able to count on the support of every member of council for a Yes vote.*

*We don't have to agree on every project. But I know we can agree on the need to expand transit across the region—the need to choose sustainable transportation over a future of gridlock and degraded transit service.*

*So I want to ask all of you—everyone here today, everyone taking part online—I'm asking you to join this effort. Speak to your friends and neighbours. Volunteer when the campaign begins.*

*Let's make ours an overwhelming vote for the future of our region: sustainable, prosperous and green.*

*I said at the outset that we've come a long way in six years. We've taken on the responsibility of leadership, and we're showing the world how a city can be both prosperous and liveable. How we can be sustainable and vibrant. How we can be innovative and just.*

*And it's a quality of leadership—it's a quality of this proud city—that our achievements only spur us to do more.*

*That we don't just boast about how far we've come, but use the heights we've scaled to see how much further we can go.*

*That we don't just bask in accomplishments, but resolve to do more, and do better.*

*When I think of that spirit, I can think of many individuals from Vancouver's history. One name that comes to mind today is Pat Quinn.*

*He gave his all to build a winning team—in good seasons and tough ones. To inspire not just his players, and not even just the fans, but this whole city. We remember him today, and for many years to come.*

*We will need that spirit in the next four years more than any time in our past.*

*These years will be momentous. The coming year alone will see the thrill of the FIFA Women's World Cup... the historic commitment I hope we'll make to a modern, effective transit system... and the first groundbreaking steps of our new affordable housing agency.*

*The opportunities and challenges we face, we face together.*

*We face them with a tremendously diverse community drawn from all the cultures of the world.*

*We face them with businesses and institutions of higher learning that can go toe to toe with any on the planet.*

*We face them with a burgeoning tech sector that offers new and bigger opportunities every day.*

*We face them with a resurgent artistic and cultural voice, and a creative economy stronger than ever before.*

*We face them in full partnership with our First Nations, a partnership that has found new strength through the Year of Reconciliation, thanks to the strong voices of people like Karen Joseph, who have built new cultural bridges through empathy and understanding. Karen, we're grateful to have you joining us today.*

*We face the opportunities and challenges of the next four years with our eyes to the world and a confidence that does this city proud.*

*Today the world looks to Vancouver. And together, we will show them what a great city can be.*

*Thank you.*

*- Gregor Robertson*