

Mayor Philip Owen

Inauguration Address

December 6, 1999

Your Honour Mr. Justice Wallace Oppal, Reverend Dr. Harry Robinson, Council colleagues, city staff, family and friends.

As you are aware, we are on the edge of the new millennium. This is an exciting time to live in Vancouver, and to be leading the city. We live in the best city in the world. The natural beauty, coupled with a high quality of life makes us internationally recognized as one of the world's most liveable cities. This has been backed up by many organizations and international publications. Recently, the renowned Economist magazine picked Vancouver as the number one city in the world in a quality of life index.

We are all very proud of our city's history, and how that history has made Vancouver the great city it is today. Council will continue to support the important work done by the Heritage Advisory Commission and the Heritage Conservation Foundation Board.

In the past six years, with a strong and dedicated staff, the City of Vancouver has received national awards for our Neighbourhood Integrated Services Teams (NIST), CityPlan, cultural diversity programs, greenways, heritage preservation, skyline study, and energy conservation.

Vancouver is a much better city today than it was 50, 30, or even 15 years ago. I remember growing up in Vancouver when all cars were equipped with fog lights. The air quality around what is now Granville Island and False Creek was dangerously poor due to heavy industry. I remember the gas works on what is now Andy Livingstone park, and the lumber mills large beehive burners. For several summers when I was in my early teens, we were not allowed to use the beach at English Bay for fear of getting polio. I'm proud to have played a role in shaping and improving the city over the last decade.

We have accomplished a number of significant projects in the past few years, such as the new main library complex, new market and non-market housing (particularly downtown) emergency preparedness, with the new E-Comm building at Cassiar and Hastings, two salt water pumping stations, downtown bridge upgrades, and dedicated fire protection lines.

The City successfully won two court challenges when the Provincial government wanted to impose gambling expansion in Vancouver, against the wishes of the majority of citizens, and of Council.

Vancouver was the first city in Canada to bring in an anti-smoking bylaw; and the first in North America to require a fire sprinkler system in all new residential homes.

I believe Vancouver's future is about people and partnerships. The old style politics of conflict and confrontation has not worked in the past, and will not work in the future, for the benefit of the citizens of Vancouver. It is now more important than ever to develop a dialogue of coordination and cooperation with the two senior levels of government. We have started to accomplish this through the five-year federal government's National Crime Prevention funding, and through the draft Vancouver Agreement, a document of cooperation signed by the federal, provincial, and city governments. The

city is working in partnership with its citizens through the coalition for crime prevention and drug treatment, community based policing, block watch and NIST.

Safe and healthy communities are the backbone of a city. As many of you know, much of my attention over my last term has been focused on this issue. In the fall of 1996, the mayor's Urban Safety Commission was launched to deal with the many crime and safety issues in the city.

Out of the commission came the creation of Vancouver's Coalition for Crime Prevention and Drug Treatment in October 1997. The Coalition has the dual goals of increasing awareness and education of illegal drug abuse, alcoholism, and the prevention of crime, specifically property crime. We now have over 60 partners from a broad spectrum of the community. The City has committed \$2 million towards the creation of a drug treatment centre. City Council have advocated for a sobering centre and increased alcohol detox facilities and drug treatment centres to senior levels of government.

Vancouver is leading the nation in developing a strategy to deal with crime and drug issues. I met recently with big city mayors from across Canada and a group of law enforcers and harm reduction experts at a conference at Stanford University, California and updated them on our plan to follow "the four pillar approach" as researched by our own Social Planning department. This plan has been successful for many years in Europe. The four pillars are prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and enforcement. This blueprint was warmly received and endorsed by both groups and I'm confident will lead to a national drug strategy and a national drug policy in Canada.

All research has led me to conclude that we cannot arrest our way out of the illegal drug problem. We all realize that the United States "war on drugs" has failed. The police are the only designated agency to deal with the trafficking of illegal drugs and we need to bring other agencies on board to help deal with this issue. I believe drug users are sick and pushers are evil. Anyone who traffics in human misery by selling illegal narcotics should be dealt with very harshly. The trafficking and consumption of illegal drugs on our streets and in our parks is totally unacceptable to the citizens of Vancouver.

The City is also taking action. The year 2000 will see additional police officers on our streets, along with encouraging the ongoing development of community policing and support of block watch programs. It is through these valued partnerships that we can truly make a difference in our city. The city will also continue the extra street and lane cleaning in the neighbourhoods of Chinatown, Gastown, and the Downtown Eastside, to deal with graffiti, to fund street art programs, the open air street markets that bring communities together to celebrate neighbourhoods.

We enacted a shop closing bylaw designed to shut down businesses in the Downtown Eastside between 2 and 6 a.m. to bring calm and quiet to residents. Council has also taken a strong stand against cafes and grocery stores that are operating inappropriately or in contravention of our bylaws in the downtown eastside, and in other neighbourhoods, and has revoked over 20 business licenses in 1999 alone.

The creation of the Coalition led to the recent signing of the draft Vancouver Agreement by the City, the Provincial government, and the Federal government. For the first time, all three levels of government will be working together to solve problems on a sustainable basis for short and long term solutions to social issues in Vancouver.

In addition, the city and the Coalition received \$5 million in funding over five years from the Federal government through the National Crime Prevention Program to address the problems in the Downtown Eastside and surrounding neighbourhoods.

But even with all these efforts, I can't promise you an overnight solution. There is still a great deal of work to be done. It will take hard work from those of us in government, our dedicated staff and, most

important, the citizens of Vancouver to work in partnership with us to address these problems. To achieve change we need the support of the Federal Minister of Immigration, the Minister of Justice, the Attorney General of British Columbia, and the Vancouver/Richmond health board.

As part of our commitment to deal with the root causes of crime, the City will continue its unparalleled record of building affordable housing. Vancouver is the leading Canadian city in this area. We will continue to partner with non-profit organizations, the private sector, and the Province of British Columbia, to build housing units for low-income singles and families, seniors and first nations people in all areas of the city. We will also continue to replace substandard SROs (single room occupancy) rooms with new, quality accommodation. The City recently signed an agreement with the province to build 1,100 new social housing units over the next two years, and we hope to expand that partnership to include the federal government in the near future.

As we all know, the economic health of our province, and our city, is a concern. But I believe the new millennium will see Vancouver lead British Columbia's economic transition. As the focal point of growth sectors such as high technology, bio technology, tourism, the film industry, and small business, Vancouver will be at the forefront creating new jobs and a sense of optimism that will be felt throughout the entire province. And right now, the city is doing its part to fuel that growth.

Council supported the Vancouver economic development commission's mandate, which is to attract investment and support new business ventures in the city. This includes the much-needed economic revitalization of the Downtown Eastside area. In the new year, this activity will be expanded to include the region, under an organization known as the Greater Vancouver partnership.

Council recently rezoned the Finning lands around Great Northern Way to accommodate the burgeoning high-tech and bio-tech industries. QLT Phototherapeutic Inc. will be moving into their new building in that area later this month. Also, City Council will continue to support the ongoing work of staff in streamlining the development and permitting process.

The health and spirit of our city is also reflected in the vitality of our artistic community. The visual and performing arts will continue to receive our support and gratitude.

To meet the demands of our growing conference, cruise ship and tourism industries, we need a new, larger, trade and convention centre. I am confident that in the coming months that plan will get back on track and construction will begin.

In closing, I want to express to you all how very proud and honoured I am to be re-elected mayor of this great city. Vancouver is a city that embraces and celebrates cultural diversity, and we will continue to welcome people from all over the world who come here through due process to follow their dreams. I am committed to maintaining a fiscally responsible government that has the only AAA credit rating of any city in Canada, as well as continuing to lead a socially responsible government that listens to and responds to its citizens. The future holds many exciting challenges and the one constant about Vancouver is its history of change.

The new millennium will see Vancouver and the resort municipality of Whistler put forward a strong bid to host the 2010 Winter Olympics. We will continue to work with the provincial government and Translink on the SkyTrain extension. Earlier this year, City Council initiated the transportation monitoring system, which is a program to monitor neighbourhood transportation activity and will lead to a downtown transportation plan in 2000 and 2001.

As we look forward to serving the citizens of Vancouver over the next three years, we must acknowledge the work of the dedicated and hard working staff, on which we, as politicians, rely so heavily on for their expert advice and guidance, and I commend them for their professionalism.

I know that by working together with the community we can achieve great things in a city that's in balance, and works for all its citizens.

Thank you.

Philip Owen