

**BERRY VRBANOVIC
FOR MAYOR**

**CAMPAIGN LAUNCH
SPEECH**

Friday March 21, 2014
Chicopee Ski Club & Summer Resort
12 Noon

Check Against Delivery

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Thank you all for coming.

Thank you to Franck Hivert and Chandrika Anjaria for that kind introduction. Both of you have amazing stories. Both of you are incredible examples of people who have made Kitchener home. And most of all, both of you are incredible examples of community leadership and giving back to our community.

Ladies and gentlemen – today, I’m asking for your support. I’m asking for your support to help build strong neighbourhoods, a growing economy and a better Kitchener.

And I’m asking for your vote on October 27th to become Kitchener’s next Mayor.

But, before I talk more about the kind of Kitchener I think we can build together, I want to begin by thanking each and every one of you for taking time out of your busy day to be here today.

The road to this day has been a long one of committed public service, but it is not one that I have taken alone. I would be remiss if I did not begin by thanking my family and close friends who have been on this journey with me. Getting here would not have been possible without your love and support. To my Mom and my godmother who are in the audience today, former school friends and to all the family and friends who have been on this journey with me, including my late Father – thank you, hvala.

And I would be remiss if I didn’t thank the many members of our community here today, who have helped me and guided me in my journey of public service. Thank you all as well, for your help, guidance and support through the years.

When my family immigrated to Canada from present day Croatia, 45 years ago this past February, with this 2.5 year-old, in tow, I would guess that my parents had no idea I would be standing before you today as a candidate for Mayor of this great city. To be honest, I’m not sure what my parents envisioned as we flew into the snow covered, flat land of Winnipeg at the time. From Winnipeg, it was off to Hamilton for the next 7 years before settling here, in Kitchener, this great community we have called home for the past 37 years.

My family and I come from simple roots where the values of working hard, getting the job done, and acting with integrity, were the values taught to me by my working-class, car mechanic father. My mom, who was kept from going on beyond high school due to post-WWII economics and her outspokenness against the new communist government in what was then Yugoslavia, taught me to always stand up for what is right, to never discriminate and to always complete each task you commit to...no matter how big or how small.

Those are the values I learned growing up in an immigrant family trying their best to play a productive role in building a stronger Canada. And, those are the values, taught to me by my parents, that laid the foundation for who I am today, and for the kind of Mayor I

want to be in the future.

Now, to be clear, these values are not unique to me or to my family. They are values we share with so many in this community. From our industrious Mennonite roots here in Kitchener, focused on community barn-building, to the modern-era spirit of community collaboration that has allowed us to effectively lobby for more Go Transit service to and from our community, it is these values of respect, hard work, equality and innovation that have shaped who we are as a community, and that must guide us in the years ahead.

Protecting & Celebrating Our Mid-Sized, Close-knit Feel

The challenges we are facing as a city and as a region are not small, and will not be easily tackled.

There is no question that the City of Kitchener and the Region of Waterloo are growing, and we will continue to grow for many years to come. We have been designated as a growth centre by the Province's Places to Grow strategy.

So, the question we face is not whether we grow, it is how we grow – and how we protect and celebrate the mid-sized, close knit feel of our community while welcoming the benefits of a larger community.

In the years ahead we will be confronted with important questions and tough decisions like:

- How do we welcome the amenities, vibrancy and job opportunities that come with a larger city while protecting and celebrating our mid-size feel and avoiding big-city challenges like traffic congestion, more smog and increased crime?
- And, how do we protect the special, close knit nature of our neighbourhoods, increase our green spaces and ensure residents have meaningful opportunities to have a say on the future of their community, while avoiding big-city apathy, neighbours that don't know one another, and the ever expanding sea of asphalt.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am running to be the next Mayor of the City of Kitchener because I believe that as our city continues to grow, we need to ensure we are focused on fostering strong neighbourhoods, supporting a growing economy and building a better Kitchener.

And I believe I am the right person to bring our community together to make sure that happens.

Strong Neighbourhoods

Strong neighbourhoods...

Over the past number of years, we have been focused on strengthening the heart of our community – our Downtown. Today, there is a strong and growing momentum in our downtown that was not there just a few short years ago, and that is good news for us all. But, while we have achieved significant progress in this area, we cannot take our eye off the ball. We need to continue to support that momentum when necessary, because supporting a strong downtown Kitchener is about supporting a strong regional economy.

However, the time has come to refocus our efforts, our resources and our passion on the one thing that makes this such a great city and the one thing that makes us unique across Canada – our neighbourhoods.

From Bridgeport to Country Hills, and from Forest Heights to Stanley Park, the number one strength of our city is our neighbourhoods and our neighbours.

So, what do I mean by building strong neighbourhoods?

I mean it is time to refocus on fostering neighbourhoods that bring people together through neighbourhood events and community festivals. I mean we can and should do more to support our volunteer organizations, like our strong network of neighbourhood associations. And, I mean maintaining and strengthening our commitment to neighbourhood gathering spaces like our community centres, libraries, soccer fields, hockey arenas and swimming pools.

Just as importantly, building strong neighbourhoods is about enhancing the playgrounds, parks, trails and natural spaces in our neighbourhoods -- completing the missing links to connect each of our neighbourhoods to one another, to promote walkability, cycling, environmental sustainability, and to provide residents with places to come together and spend quality time with one another – with their family and their friends.

Building strong neighbourhoods is also about investing in public transit, a better maintained road network, and a complete system of trails for those who prefer to walk and cycle. This comprehensive approach to transportation in our neighbourhoods can help us improve road safety, manage traffic congestion and allow people to spend more time at home with their family, instead of in their cars stuck in traffic. And, this interconnected transportation system can help keep our residents, from our youth to our seniors, active, healthy and connected to one another.

It is our neighbourhoods that make Kitchener unique and make our community such a special place to live. For this reason, it is time to refocus on making them healthy,

vibrant and age friendly places for all of our residents to live, work and play.

Growing Economy

Of course, strong neighbourhoods require a growing economy. For that reason, we must live within our economic means and ensure good job opportunities and a strong financial foundation for today and for tomorrow.

Ten years ago, it was quickly becoming apparent that changing global economic forces were going to have a profound effect on Kitchener's economy and on our job market. In the face of globalization and a fundamental shift in the world's manufacturing sector, our manufacturers were beginning to struggle. Difficult decisions had to be made that would help create new opportunities by diversifying our local economy and positioning us to create jobs for decades to come.

We have made significant progress in diversifying our local economy in recent years. Imagine where we would be as a community without our growing education and technology and digital media sectors. Imagine where our service sector would be if not for the growth in these new foundations of our economy.

We must continue to build on the successes we have achieved in diversifying our local economy, because the job is not done. We must continue to support the establishment of our many start-ups that are creating jobs in our community right now – companies like Thalmic Labs and Vidyard as well as the growth of established companies such as Christie Digital, Desire2Learn, Google and Square.

Of equal importance however, we must identify and support new sectors of our economy that provide the greatest opportunities for those in our community that have traditionally worked in manufacturing.

We must also continue to support the growth of small businesses in our community as a strong driver of our economic engines.

We must work with the province and the Federal government to make sure retraining programs are easily accessible for all of our residents. I can envision one stop customer service centres, located right in our neighbourhood-based community centres, so that our residents can access programs, services and supports from all levels of government, quickly and easily.

And finally, in the pursuit of a growing economy, I believe we must become much more aggressive in going out and finding new companies, new entrepreneurs, and new talent and attracting them right here to the City of Kitchener and Waterloo region. I believe we can and we must do better in this regard.

Better Kitchener

Strong Neighbourhoods. A Growing Economy. All of this, I believe, leads to a Better Kitchener.

It is important that we never forget that, at its core, the City of Kitchener is about providing the programs and services residents want and need. I believe, we can do better in providing more effective and efficient programs and services for our residents.

How you ask? Through five core principles of governance.

One - Improved customer service

When residents interact with the city they should be satisfied with the service they receive and they should receive a seamless customer service experience, not the city hall run-around.

Two - Efficient and Effective services

We must always be looking for more efficient and effective ways to operate. This includes moving to a financial strategy that is more focused on the changing times in which we operate – one that moves away from spending and towards investing. It means relooking at our capital budget and seeing how do we best support the investments the community needs and expects... done within the money available.

Three – A Commitment to accountability - especially online

We need to find new ways to engage residents in decisions about where and how tax dollars should be invested in their neighbourhoods. It's about using technology such as twitter, Facebook and emerging tools in conjunction with our traditional communications such as newspaper columns, public meetings and getting out to community events. This is an area I have been particularly committed to throughout my time in public office.

Four - Openness

We need to make sure we follow through with the City of Kitchener's Open government initiative so that we build a culture at city hall that is "open by default". The starting principle should always be that the information available to our staff and council should be available to our community, except in very exceptional circumstances.

And Five - Taxes –

Building strong neighbourhoods. Growing our economy. All of this must be done with property tax rate increases in line with the rate of inflation. This is the expectation of the vast majority of our residents, and this is what a Council team, led by me, will deliver. Each tax dollar we spend is your tax dollar and I will treat it as such.

So friends, after having spent the last several weeks consulting with many in the community, I have been humbled by your encouragement, and convinced that I have the values, skills and background... and also the energy and forward looking vision needed to become your next Mayor of our great city, Kitchener.

Yes, my time on Council has given me the experience necessary to make things happen in our community.

And my time representing our community in the leadership of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has given me the experience necessary to work with the provincial and federal governments when necessary.

However, most importantly, my time on Council has demonstrated that I have a proven track record at the neighbourhood level of building the kinds of community connections and alliances necessary to move things forward for the good of all of our citizens. Indeed, I believe my time on Council has demonstrated that I am just as comfortable leading an initiative as I am in putting on my work-boots and helping others to make it happen.

I know that in the coming months, I must prove to you, the people of Kitchener that I have earned your trust to move from my current role of community service to this new role as Mayor. I must listen to your perspectives on strong neighbourhoods and a growing economy because the vision for a Better Kitchener, can't just be my vision, it must be a shared vision, built with input and participation from the entire community.

I look forward to open dialogue and healthy debate with our community in the months ahead, because it is through that sharing of your hopes, dreams and aspirations for our community, that we can build something truly great – a healthy community and a better Kitchener.

Fundamentally, that's what leadership is all about – listening, and then acting.

In fact, in my home office, I have a plaque on the wall that reads:

The Essence of Success – “Successful is the person who has lived well, laughed often and loved much, who has gained the respect of children who leaves the world better than they found it, who has never lacked appreciation for the earth's beauty, who never fails to look for the best in others or give the best of themselves.”

By voting Berry Vrbanovic for Mayor on October 27th, you will get someone committed to public service, committed to our community and committed to building a Better Kitchener.

But today, I need your help!

I ask for your support in the campaign ahead.

And I ask you to join me in working together with you to build Strong Neighbourhoods, a Growing Economy and a Better Kitchener.

Thank you very much!