



**Mayor Dave Barrow's
STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**

Annual Mayor's Luncheon
Richmond Hill Board of Trade

Friday, October 9, 2020

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Good afternoon.

I'd like to begin by thanking the Richmond Hill Board of Trade for once again inviting me to participate in this annual event, albeit a slightly different format than in previous years.

One year ago, I stood in front of Richmond Hill's business community and spoke about our plans to move the City forward in the coming year.

It's hard to grasp just how much has changed not only in Richmond Hill, but across the globe, since then.

The COVID-19 pandemic is unlike anything we have experienced in our lifetimes. The impacts are serious, from a health perspective and from economic and community building angles as well.

But Richmond Hill is a strong community. And that strength is pulling us through.

We came together and all did our part to help protect our families, neighbours, friends and entire community. Those efforts have made, and continue to make, a difference.

We continue to monitor the economic impacts of COVID 19 and initial data suggests that the economy will continue to rebound into 2021-2022.

I am proud of how the City is tackling this challenge, and how our residents and business community are responding.

Businesses who helped make a difference

I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge some of the businesses that stepped up during the difficult times caused by COVID-19.

- **Laipac Technology**, Richmond Hill's 2018 Innovator of the Year, has developed a rapid, inexpensive and easy-to-use COVID-19 test that gets results in less than five minutes. The company is currently in the process of obtaining approval from Health Canada
- **Container Corporation of Canada** retooled their business not only manufacture bottles, but to produce hand sanitizer to fill the bottles as well
- **Makerwiz** is using its 3D printers to make a protective face shield for staff in seniors' homes and have donated some of its product to help keep health care workers safe
- **Apotex** donated pharmaceuticals to support six clinical trials taking place in Canada to help fight COVID-19. They also donated close to 2000 N-95 masks to local health systems and adapted to produce hand sanitizer at a modified plant

- **Edsby**, provider of online education packages, is helping students learn safely at home not only in Canada, but around the world

These are just a few of the Richmond Hill organizations who are making a real difference. To everyone who is doing their part: thank you.

City efforts: tax relief and minimizing financial impact

For our part, very early on, Council recognized the challenges residents and business are facing and put measures in place almost immediately to help those most in need.

For example, we introduced relief measures on property tax and water bill payments to support people who are dealing with financial hardship due to COVID-19.

A testament to the strength and resilience of our community, 90% of residents still paid their taxes on time. This helped the City continue providing essential services such as fire and emergency service, waste collection and safe drinking water for all.

We also made a number of difficult decisions in an effort to minimize the future financial impacts of COVID-19 on residents and businesses, such as the layoff and redeployment of City staff, and worked to find budget savings.

And, the City is working hard to find new ways to modernize government services and provide the same, or better, service more efficiently.

We implemented credit card payments for tax and water bills.

We continued using new technological advancements such as an artificial intelligence system for identifying potholes, a system created by local company Visual Defence.

We introduced online applications for residential building permits.

And we are continuing to find new ways to digitize our services.

Thanks to these efforts, combined with support from the federal and provincial governments, I am pleased to say we are aiming for the lowest tax increase Richmond Hill has experienced in more than 15 years.

Support for Business and Recover Richmond Hill

As the pandemic continued and uncertainty grew, we knew we needed to do more to support our local businesses and to accelerate economic recovery.

In April, our Council created the Recover Richmond Hill Task Force to help local businesses reopen, retool and recover from the economic impacts of COVID-19.

The Task Force is a true partnership between the City, the Region, provincial and federal elected officials and local business associations, including **Karen Mortfield – Executive Director of the Board of Trade**, to ensure all businesses are part of Richmond Hill’s recovery.

The Task Force developed a 10-point action plan including:

- Providing micro-grants of \$5000 each to help small businesses implement recovery plans. There are currently 45 candidates for the grant program.
- Launching a Municipal Business Innovation Contest, to provide small businesses an opportunity to partner with the City of Richmond Hill on innovative products and services. The Contest launched in September and I’m happy to say we received several viable ideas to solve government challenges.
- Creating a Local Innovation Centre to support entrepreneurs, help grow new businesses and accelerate business investment.
- Developing a Shop Local campaign including a Shop Safe Downtown program, in partnership with the Richmond Hill Board of Trade and the Village of Richmond Hill BIA to encourage residents to shop local and in the historic downtown

I was happy to do my own small part to support local business with my Shop Local Ontario Twitter campaign.

I visited many local businesses this summer, took photos with the owners and Tweeted my support.

I continue to personally encourage residents to support local Richmond Hill businesses.

To date, the City has provided over 550 consultations with businesses during the crisis and established a business support hotline to help connect businesses with reopening and recovery programs.

We also offered numerous online seminars to help local businesses navigate COVID-19.

As the community began to re-open, Council passed a Temporary Use By-law to pave the way for local restaurants and cafés to create or expand outdoor patio space to welcome patrons back safely.

Richmond Hill also teamed up with “ShopHERE powered by Google” to help local businesses create an online store built at no cost so they could sell products and services online with ease.

And we were the first municipality in Canada to partner with Freshworks for Startups, giving Richmond Hill startups and entrepreneurs access to a variety of products, events, resources, workshops, mentoring and much more.

Building our community

While our focus has been on keeping our community safe and supporting local businesses through this pandemic, the City also continues to move forward on a range of other community-building initiatives this year.

Richmond Hill is in a unique position, poised for considerable residential and commercial growth now and continuing well into the future.

One of the most exciting developments in our future, as I spoke about last year, is the extension of the Yonge North Subway.

We are working closely with our regional and provincial counterparts to shape plans for the subway extension to Richmond Hill.

And capitalizing on this, we also continue to develop plans for the Richmond Hill Centre area which we anticipate will bring new jobs and become a community of choice for residents, visitors and businesses.

This year, the City is also pleased to celebrate a number of new or expanded amenities in our community, including:

- The grand opening of the new state-of-the-art Oak Ridges Library
- The Lake Wilcox boardwalk – a 130-metre-long, three-metre-wide pedestrian walkway at our beautiful destination park
- The expansion of Ed Sackfield Arena featuring an NHL-sized ice pad, a new fitness studio and aerobics room, new change rooms and the City's first 180 metre long indoor track
- A redeveloped David Hamilton Park including new play areas, a splash pad, a walking loop, multi-use courts and more

Our Council continued to champion the environment, launching Richmond Hill's first Urban Forest Management Plan to strengthen the City's ability to maintain our 2.6 million trees and help keep our community healthy and resilient.

Finally, recognizing just how much COVID-19 has changed our lives and our path forward, Council embarked on the development of a new strategic plan to ensure the City is focused on meeting the needs of the community over the next two years.

Last month, we asked for feedback from the community – I sincerely hope you all had a chance to provide your input - and we expect the plan to be finalized before the end of the year.

Without a doubt, 2020 has been a challenging year.

What has kept me going through all of this is the incredible spirit from the people I speak with in the community.

Residents who are making the best of frustrating times by exploring our trails, helping make masks, staying fit with our online rec videos and so much more.

Small businesses I visited who are working with the City to adapt their services to provide online purchasing, curbside pickup and delivery, and wonderful take-out meals.

This is the lifeblood of our community. And nothing has filled my heart with greater pride than seeing how we are coming together to do our part to help stop the spread of this terrible virus.

We are going to be okay.

My deepest gratitude to you, your employees, your customers, our City staff and Richmond Hill residents...

Together we are keeping Richmond Hill on a path to prosperity.

No matter what challenges we face, we are proving our resilience.

Richmond Hill deserves to thrive. And together, we will.

Thank you and stay safe.