

***State of the City Address – Mayor Josh Morgan***  
***January 25th, 2024***

Miigwech. Good morning, and thank you all for joining us. Thank you to the London Chamber of Commerce for organizing this event, the largest of its kind anywhere in Canada, and the 45<sup>th</sup> consecutive year Londoners have taken part in this annual tradition.

I'd like to thank RBC Place London for hosting, and the Chamber's Board of Directors, members, and volunteers for continuing to support this storied event under the leadership of Graham Henderson.

I also want to acknowledge Deputy Mayor Shawn Lewis, Budget Chair Elizabeth Pelosa, and all members of London City Council. You'll remember, we had eight new faces after the last election, but even still - we hit the ground running. To my colleagues, I am honoured to serve with you, and proud of your willingness to tackle issues of substance head-on.

Allow me to also recognize the senior leadership team, all City of London staff, union executives and dedicated members. You are our greatest ambassadors, embodying the values of dedication and excellence, and are crucial to the success and effectiveness of Council in serving our community.

And lastly, I need to honour our City Manager Lynne Livingstone. After 33 years in public service, the last 16 with the City, Lynne is set to retire in mid-March. She was actually supposed to step away last month, but agreed to stay a little longer at my request, so, for that, we owe a great debt to not only Lynne, but her family as well. The legacy she leaves behind is truly unmatched, and her example is one that will continue to guide many, including myself, going forward. Lynne, thank you for your patience, thank you for your service, and thank you for your friendship.

As we gather here today, a few weeks into the start of a new year, we can envision a blank canvass of opportunity. We look forward, as we always do, with a mix of excitement and trepidation at what lays ahead. By the same measure, a new year offers time to reflect on that which just concluded.

And, let's be honest, last year was not easy. The pressures associated with inflation and rising interest rates cast a shadow of financial strain upon all Canadians, and Londoners were no different. Everything from mortgage payments, groceries, transportation, student loans, and credit card payments. The last twelve months have been exceptionally difficult.

But, at the same time, it's true what they say – you learn a lot about people when times are hard. You learn a lot about your community too. Over and over again, I have been inspired by Londoners.

I think of those who continue to show up for their neighbours, their friends, and their families. Businesses that go beyond profit-making to actively engage with the community, individuals who volunteer, those who model quiet acts of compassion and empathy, and those who give without expecting to get. The Business Cares Food Drive from last month is a great example. Despite the rising cost of essentials, people in this city somehow found a way to donate even more than they did last year. Or, what about free counselling offered by social work students at King's University College, providing supports within the Centre of Hope and Mission Services?

Like I said, I am constantly inspired by Londoners, but never like I have been over this past year. During times of struggle and times of hardship, it's imperative we display our best values rather than our worst

fears. And nowhere has that been more evident than with the work we've done on health and homelessness.

At last year's State of the City address, I referred to it as the most pressing challenge facing our city today. One year later, that hasn't changed. However, what has changed is we're no longer discussing it in the abstract. Instead, in just twelve months, we've moved from concept to implementation. Atlohsa and Y.O.U. have opened our first two hubs, and we have created 69 highly supportive housing units that didn't exist before. Most importantly, homeless Londoners with complex needs – the types of individuals who simply aren't suited for traditional shelter spaces – are coming off the streets, and entering pathways towards housing.

We received a significant head-start on this effort thanks to that historic \$25-million dollar donation from an anonymous London family which I had the privilege of announcing on this stage last year. I remember audible gasps in the audience, not only due to the size of the donation, but the pride that comes from knowing you live in a community with such incredible people.

While that family remains anonymous to this day, I meet with them regularly – and they've asked me to relay the following message on their behalf (here's what they said):

*"This is complex work, and will take a bit of time to be where we all want. But, as donors, we are thrilled with where things are right now – and we are so proud to be part of this life-changing system. It's easy to focus on what has not yet been done rather than celebrating the huge accomplishments achieved already. We, as Londoners, need to brag a little more and appreciate progress. In a short period of time, we've been recognized as a national leader in this area, and have started to implement a system that can be replicated by other Canadian cities."*

I thank them for their words, and they're right. We have an opportunity to save lives and change lives. We also have an opportunity to lead. There's a reason why we're not implementing plans that have been tried elsewhere. That's because no other city has come up with a truly viable solution. At the same time, no other community has come together in the way ours has.

There is immense interest in what we're doing, not only across Ontario and Canada, but even cities in the United States. However, this isn't about praise – this is all about people. People like Erika:

*\*\* video \*\**

This is what happens when you believe in people. This is what happens when you trust in your community. And this is what happens when you prioritize long-term homeless responses over short-term political goals, and band-aid solutions. In my role as Mayor, I am not just here to do a job, or deliver on a mandate – I am here to deliver on a purpose.

I'm not alone on that either. While the City of London has an important role in the delivery of this System, it is not 'The City of London's' system. It belongs to the community. This was designed by our hospitals and public health, front line workers, people with lived or living experience, social service agencies, emergency services, outreach workers, developers, and the private sector. I thank them for their continued commitment, and I am proud to stand with them in the delivery of this new system.

I am also thankful for supports received from the federal and provincial governments, most notably the Housing Accelerator Fund, along with a significant increase in funding from the Homelessness Prevention Program. I am grateful for the efforts of Rob Flack, Peter Fragiskatos, and Arielle Kayabaga – each of whom have been dedicated and strong advocates for London at Queen’s Park and Parliament Hill, respectively.

And when it comes to funding, I’d like to update you on something. You’ll remember last year, that \$25-million dollar donation came with a challenge. If Londoners could raise an additional \$5-million, the donors would match that dollar for dollar. As of right now, \$4.1-million dollars have been raised. So, once we hit that target – between the matching funds and the original donation, as a community we will have raised \$35-million dollars.

Thank you to all who have donated, in amounts big and small, and thank you to all who are involved with the fundraising committee, led by Jeff Macoun from Canada Life. This is truly exceptional work, and yet another sign that our community’s commitment to this cause is unwavering.

And when you speak of commitment, how about this? I am proud to announce this morning that four of London’s most prominent developers and builders have stepped up in a major way. Tricar, Auburn Group, Drewlo, and Sifton Properties have facilitated the acquisition of a vacant long-term care residence for prompt transformation into supportive housing with wrap-around services.

The two-storey site, just west of Wharncliffe overlooking the Coves, is the former Elmwood Place Long-Term Care Home, and has the potential to provide more than 40 new units of highly supportive housing.

Aside from facilitating the acquisition of the property, these developers – in partnership with Indwell - will coordinate and manage all construction and retrofits required to get this property ready for operation as soon as possible.

Like so many others -- Tricar, Auburn, Drewlo, and Sifton were engaged in the Health and Homelessness Summits from the start and were inspired to contribute. When we say, ‘whole of community,’ we mean it. Everybody is onboard.

As we enter this new year, our Whole of Community response has greater momentum and greater opportunity than ever before. Our only limiting factor at this point, the only thing preventing us from opening more hubs and more supportive housing, is healthcare related operating dollars to fund the necessary supports.

It cannot be stressed enough – what we’re trying to do isn’t simply a question of providing beds or shelter. We’re also providing services -- the types of services that help stabilize those with complex needs, and get them to a point where they can live successfully and independently. The challenges these individuals face are not solved by shelter alone.

If you really want to understand the impact of highly supportive housing, consider this: back in October, LHSC partnered with London Cares to open 25 of these units in a building on Dundas near Waterloo. Prior to moving in, one of the residents had accessed ER services 221 times the previous year. However, since landing in stable housing that individual has gone to the ER just once.

Services are solutions, and these solutions are largely healthcare related – an area municipalities have

traditionally not been able to fund. We are at a point now where our Whole of Community approach requires Whole of Government support, and I will continue my engagements with government partners to ensure the momentum we're celebrating today is not stalled in the weeks and months ahead.

Something else I'd like to make clear: this is not the only thing we're doing to address homelessness. It's a significant piece, but it's just one piece. While hubs and highly supportive housing are meant for those with complex needs, a significant number of people in our community are homeless simply because they can't obtain, or even afford, housing. That's not lost on us, and in that area – we are also making significant progress.

Over the last year, nearly 1,000 affordable housing units have either started construction, or have been approved for development by this Council; 1,000 in just over a year.

That includes examples like the Re-Imagine Southdale Project with London-Middlesex Community Housing which involves the removal of dilapidated townhouses, and replacing them with three, six-storey apartments that will add 97 net new units of affordable housing. This marks the first time in 50 years that LMCH has undertaken new housing construction efforts.

And, of course, there's the Vision SOHO project, redeveloping the old South St. hospital lands, with six not-for-profit partners building 681 total apartment units; with well over half of those being affordable. Shovels are in the ground and construction is underway.

Another thing that helps with affordability, especially in a city like ours, is ensuring post-secondary students live in purpose-built student housing – instead of rental properties. Western University is set to break ground this year on two new residence buildings, offering on-campus housing to nearly 1,000 students. Investments like this help to stabilize rental prices and make housing more affordable for non-student residents.

When we look at housing more broadly, in terms of increasing supply across the board, London is quickly establishing itself as a model for other communities. Earlier this year, the province challenged all municipalities across Ontario to become part of the solution. London was the first city to sign on, pledging to help create 47,000 new units in ten years. Just a few months after that, we were the first city anywhere in Canada to secure funding under the Federal Government's Housing Accelerator Fund -- \$74-million-dollars' worth.

These things don't happen by accident. They happen because we're one of the fastest growing cities in Canada; they happen because this City Council is laser focused on the issue, and most of all, they happen because London delivers.

Consider this: last year, Council approved zoning for 5,082 new residential units. That's a 27% increase over approvals from the previous year, a 90% increase over 2021, and a 153% increase from 2020. That is staggering.

We have lots more we can do on our end, and I'll get into some of that in a moment, but one of the real challenges for 2024 and beyond is ensuring permissions turn into homes. Solving the housing shortage is an exercise in shared accountability. I've said it before, and I'll say it again – municipalities don't build homes, we issue permits. But, permissions aren't foundations. As Mayor, I am absolutely committed to working with our partners to find ways to bring those permissions to fruition.

At the same time, and in the spirit of shared accountability, I recognize there is more we can do as a municipality, and I am equally committed to ensuring we do everything we can to accelerate local housing development. As a result, I'm making a series of announcements here today to do just that:

- 1.) A renewed and aggressive commitment to work with the province, the development community, and other partners to expedite and streamline our approval processes. The budget I'll table next week will include funding to hire additional personnel to achieve this.
- 2.) I am announcing plans today for a new financial incentive program aimed at converting empty downtown office space into residential units. This will be introduced by City Staff at the February 21<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Planning and Environment committee. Our program proposes a grant for each new unit of \$20,000 for single bedroom apartments, and \$28,000 for apartments of two or more bedrooms. The opportunity to breathe new life into old buildings is immense.
- 3.) Finally, through the use of Strong Mayor powers, I will be issuing a directive to staff to prepare a request for proposals for the redevelopment of several City-owned surface parking lots in or around our downtown.

These RFPs will allow us to not only increase available on-site parking, they will also add significant residential density within new high-rise structures above the redeveloped parking facilities. A partnership utilizing City land, and the expertise of local developers on strategically selected sites, has the potential to deliver hundreds of new parking spaces, and thousands of new residences in our downtown. This strategy will contribute to an unprecedented renewal of London's core over the next decade.

As I'm sure you've noticed, our skyline downtown is already changing rapidly. Most recently, we were proud to acknowledge a new "tallest building in London" when the Centro residential development on Fullarton and Talbot Streets exceeded One London Place as workers completed the 37th storey. While at least six stories have been added since, plans have already been submitted to the City for even taller buildings, including what will be London's next - and newest - tallest structure at 50 King Street. That tower is proposed to reach 53 stories, which - as of today - would be the tallest building between Toronto and Calgary.

Although this narrative sounds like good bragging rights for a growing City, what is most significant here is the current pace of growth and development in London. It is simply unprecedented. While it took 32 years for One London Place to be surpassed in height by the Centro development, it now seems that it will be less than five years before our next tallest tower emerges. London has never grown this quickly or dramatically at any previous point in our long history.

Meanwhile, our economy is growing at an equally unprecedented rate. From the time this Council was sworn-in to office in November of 2022, more than 18,000 jobs have been added in the London census metropolitan area. That's 18,000 jobs in little more than a year! That's never been done before in such a short period of time, and, per capita, it's among the best of any city tracked by Stats Canada.

We've seen significant expansions at Labatt Brewing, Jones HealthCare, Trojan Technologies, and Bosco & Roxy's among others, resulting in hundreds of new jobs, along with the arrival of new companies like Andriani Pasta, Wyedel Power, and ANVO Pharma. Looking forward, our economy continues to expand, and diversify. Construction will soon be underway at Medicom, Canada's first nitrile glove factory, while WSIB is preparing its new London headquarters for launch the following year.

As one of the fastest growing communities in Canada, we are continuing to attract newcomers and finding new pathways for economic integration. This year, LEDC and the Small Business Centre are collaborating on an exciting initiative – New Start - to provide business guidance and mentorship to newcomer-led startups. New Start will not only empower newcomers and improve community integration, it will stimulate economic growth, job creation, and cultural richness in our community.

And it's not just about landing jobs, it's also about attracting skilled talent. Recently, LEDC worked with A.I. researchers at Western University and local tech company Knighthunter to create a unique “Made in London” technology. This artificial intelligence solution will scrape job postings from our region, including those posted on LondonTechJobs, London Manufacturing, and London Health jobs, and help LEDC market those open positions – making it easier for London companies to recruit.

Speaking of innovation, Fanshawe College will officially open the doors to Innovation Village tomorrow. It's an incredible 95,000 square-foot space that will serve as an incubator, gathering space, and marketplace for ideas, representing the start of a new chapter of innovation at Fanshawe. Meanwhile, London was once again named in CBRE's Top 10 Emerging Tech Markets in North America, up from spot #10 in 2022, to #8 last year.

Having one of the strongest, most diverse, and fastest growing economies in Canada is something we should be proud of, but it is not something we should take for granted. That is why, when I table the multi-year budget before Council next week, I will include funding for the creation of an overarching economic development strategy. This will pull together groups like the LEDC, local BIAs, TechAlliance, Small Business Centre, the Chamber, airport, post-secondary institutions, and others; aligning resources in unprecedented ways, removing silos, and fueling London's economy for decades to come.

Like so many other things, economic competitiveness is also changing. Today, competing in a more globally oriented economy is less about the individual community, and more about the combined economic strength of regions, and the clusters of organizations and businesses that support that growth. Look at the Volkswagen plant, for example. Teams from London and St. Thomas worked together to create a massive win for our region. The same is true of the Maple Leaf facility here, and the Amazon fulfillment centre in Elgin County. A unifying economic development strategy will grow London as a regional powerhouse, one that proactively attracts and retains talent, business, and investment on an international scale, while also ensuring new supports for small and growing businesses, entrepreneurs, and non-profits.

Another way we can assist with not only economic development, but quality of life in general, is by ensuring we live in a safe community. Businesses flourish when they operate in an environment where law and order prevail. More importantly, individuals and families flourish too. When one person or one family is affected by crime in our community, all of us feel it.

As it stands today, London is not a safe city. In fact, when compared to the twelve biggest cities in Ontario, we are now the third most dangerous. We have the second-fewest officers per capita amongst all single-tier municipalities with a population of at least 100,000. And we have some of the longest response times in the province with some people waiting up to a week for an officer to show up. Violent crime is on the rise, and fatal motor vehicle collisions are at an all-time high. To illustrate how far behind we are, the London Police Service's request to hire 97 new officers over the next four years still puts us slightly below the provincial average in officers per capita.

Yes, the cost is significant, and yes it will result in a noticeable, one-time impact on our property tax bills, but the cost of doing nothing – as we've all seen – is far greater. That is why as Mayor, when I table our multi-year budget next week, I will be unequivocal in my support for an unprecedented investment in public safety – the largest of its kind in London's history.

The plan put forward by Chief Truong, and unanimously supported by the Police Services Board, is exceptionally detailed and thorough, and, among other things, pledges to improve 911 response times, make our roads safer, combat violent crime, protect small businesses, and create safer neighbourhoods. We can more effectively target street racing, hate crimes, illegal firearms, child exploitation, human trafficking, and have greater Police visibility in public spaces.

So, yes, while I will be unequivocal in my support of this investment, I will be equally unequivocal in my expectation that measurable results are delivered on behalf of taxpayers. Chief Truong shares that sentiment, and is committed to ensuring this unprecedented request comes with unprecedented levels of transparency and accountability.

In addition to a renewed commitment to public safety, when the multi-year budget is tabled next week, there will also be substantial investments in transit. Similar to Police, we have underfunded public transit for decades, and we have done so to the detriment of all Londoners – not just those who rely on this vital service.

At the same time, we are seeing significant progress in several areas, particularly when it comes to connecting people to our industrial lands. Back in June, the LTC implemented a new route 38 providing service from Argyle Mall along Clarke Road and Hamilton to the Innovation Park area. And, in September, an extension of Route 36 was introduced, not only providing new industrial transit service into a growing area, but also increasing the frequency of trips to London International Airport from 30 minutes to 15 minutes on weekdays. We must continue to build on that momentum, and that must include investments to modernize and improve our paratransit service. What's happening right now denies people with mobility challenges the opportunity to participate in our economy, and our community at large. It robs them of basic decency. We must do better.

Taking a broader look at transportation, 2023 was a year of significant change. Thanks to persistent, and strategic advocacy efforts on multiple fronts, we saw the reintroduction of the early VIA Rail train from London to Toronto, along with the return of the early evening Train 83 back to London.

Major excavation and road building for the Adelaide Underpass began last year and will continue over the winter months, aiming for substantial completion by late this summer. We've also made progress on Rapid Transit-related construction projects, including the final phase of the Downtown Loop, continued construction of the East London Link, and the first phase of construction for the Wellington Gateway. As well, this year will see the addition of 20 kilometres of new bike lanes, and 18 kilometres of new sidewalks.

Of course, these measures all make important contributions to our Climate Emergency Action Plan.

As many of you know, this Council is committed to taking action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and do our part towards the community-wide target of a 55% reduction from 2005 levels by 2030. This, of course, is on the road to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

About ten days ago, and with supply chain delays overcome, we launched our city-wide Green Bin program – representing an important step forward in reducing emissions that come from food waste entering our landfill, and numerous other actions are also underway.

This includes ongoing and comprehensive energy retrofits at multiple facilities, like Kinsmen and Earl Nichols Recreation Centres; plans for a new net-zero Fire Hall, and the study of a Greenhouse Gas Reduction Roadmap and Action Plan study for up to one million square feet of municipal buildings.

Protecting our climate also requires participation from individuals and businesses alike, and in London we're seeing that. The futuristic EVE Park condo development, in Riverbend near Sifton's West 5, was just named by CNN as one of the top 10 architecture projects to shape the world in 2024. Meanwhile, recent work by Councillor Franke and Deputy Mayor Lewis saw a significant move in support of the first Green Design standards for development in our city.

I've spent a lot of time today talking about policy and core services. Still, it's important to remind ourselves that not only is London a great place to live – we're also a city that knows how to have fun.

We remain a prime destination for sports tourism as we saw once again last March when we hosted the Tim Hortons Brier. We've got the Ontario Summer Games returning in August, and come November, for the first time ever, we'll be hosting the Canadian Cross Country Championships in London – not just this year, but next year as well.

Our film office, Film London, hosted numerous projects in the city last year, including shows for NBC, Sony, and ABC, along with scenes from the BlackBerry movie, and the feature film 'You Gotta Believe' – shot over three days at London's historic Labatt Park with stars like Luke Wilson, Greg Kinnear, and Molly Parker.

There's also plenty of excitement within the London Music Office as we host the UNESCO Cities of Music Meetings late next month with all 75 international UNESCO Cities of Music receiving invites to attend, while this summer Sunfest celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary and Rock the Park its 20<sup>th</sup> with huge lineups planned for both events. And let's not forget about the launch of a new event on the summer calendar, The Great Outdoors Comedy Festival making its debut in Harris Park come July.

I'd like to close by saying this: at the start of my address, I talked about being inspired by Londoners. For as long as I can remember, I've also been inspired by the city itself – and that's because London leads by example.

Provincially, nationally -- we are no longer a city that is simply taking part. We are now a city that is taking charge.

We have people from across the country -- media, politicians, and business leaders - asking about our first of its kind approach to health and homelessness. Our anti-racism and anti-oppression policies are held up as examples for others to follow. The same is true of our commitment to make London a safe city for women and girls; the first municipality anywhere in Canada to prioritize this as part of our Strategic Plan, and last year, we were among the first to declare Intimate Partner Violence an epidemic.

I have other Mayors asking me how we were the first city in Canada to receive Housing Accelerator Funding, or how we were first to move on the provincial housing pledge. They ask why is it that so many people are moving here, and how is it that we're leading the country in job growth. I get calls asking

what is it about the London-St.Thomas region at large that we're able to compete on a global scale to land employers like Volkswagen, Maple Leaf, Amazon, Medicom, and others.

People in this room, and people throughout this city, every day, are doing such incredible things. They are leading, they are inspiring, and others are noticing. But, now - more than ever - we must remind ourselves that while inspiration is the spark, action is the fuel that keeps the flame of success burning, lighting the path for a brighter tomorrow.

While the state of our times may be challenging, the state of our city is strong.

Thank you.