

March 5, 2012

**Address to City of Windsor Council Regarding the
2012 Operating Budget**

Good evening Mayor Francis, members of City Council and Administration. My name is Jason Ilijanic and I am the present Chair of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber's Finance & Taxation Committee.

As the voice of business, the Chamber represents some 1,200 businesses of all sizes, collectively responsible for over \$10 billion in sales and employing approximately 40,000 people in a wide variety of industries. As such, it is important for us to continue to advocate for our members and the business community alike in occasions such as this.

Based on comprehensive business member surveys conducted over the past year, the Chamber's members have identified 1) economic development; 2) job creation and 3) lower business taxes as key priorities. There's no question that these are reoccurring priorities, priorities that are held by all stakeholders of Windsor.

In this regard, we are pleased to see all the hard work that is being done such as through the Windsor Essex Economic Development Corporation and other related groups that advocate for a thriving business environment. We are pleased to see development efforts through initiatives such as the Community Improvement Plan (CIP) and would like to learn more of its progress to date.

With the prospect of a zero increase tax budget, the Chamber would like to properly recognize and applaud City Council, the Budget Committee and the City of Windsor Administration in delivering the 2012 Budget.

We appreciate and are supportive of the transparency of the budget development process, the efficiencies that were found and the willingness of the City to make tough choices and to hold the line on spending in protecting the interests of all taxpayers. We

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further acknowledge that the revised or challenged property assessment have further created hardship on this already difficult process.

That being said, we are also aware of the increasing challenges that lie ahead. The 2012 Budget report and supporting documents contained the best information yet on the budget pressures and indicators of future developments. The marked improvement in financial reporting, budget analysis and recommendations over the years allow us to take a much closer look at the budget and to be more constructive with our recommendations.

On a related note, we do remain supportive of an Auditor General position and encourage the City to fill this important position in a timely manner.

The primary message from the Chamber today is one of collaboration and participation with the City, both Council and Administration. Also, it is one that seeks active involvement earlier on in the budget process. The Chamber seeks to foster a proactive framework with the City in addressing some of the pressures and challenges in the next budget and beyond. The Chamber is concerned with business taxes at all levels of government but we are also looking for solutions that will benefit not only businesses but also the community.

The finance department of the City of Windsor has indicated its willingness to discuss these issues with the Chamber and we are delighted by this. City Council direction to move to a collaborative effort in addressing business taxation issues with the Chamber of Commerce would boost cooperation and would be a welcomed element in achieving our common goal: greater economic prosperity for all.

One of the consistent themes in municipal taxation over the years relates to the industrial and commercial tax burden for businesses operating in the City of Windsor. We would like to work together with the City to address property taxes in the categories that have been above the Provincial average on a multi-year plan. Municipal tax rates are always top of mind and we simply wish to remind the City of our position relative to the rest of the Province.

Competitive business taxes will support our economic development and sustainability. We feel that this matter fits appropriately within a key pillar as presented by the Windsor

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Essex Economic Development Corporation just last week. That being business attraction and retention.

In term of budget savings, the Chamber sees this task as a continuous search for efficiencies and better business practices, whether through strategic and concerted efforts on reducing or eliminating legacy costs and overheads or the ability to earn special provincial powers to afford flexibility. We acknowledge the key budget drivers and limitations that are imposed within the Provincial framework and other political pressures. The chamber encourages continued efforts to work with the Province to aid in this task. Also, we support the City in its efforts to find alternative ways to deliver services and for considering the private sector as the delivery agent when that makes sense.

In closing, the Chamber is quite simply looking forward to a year in which we can work cooperatively together on a plan to address business issues for the 2013 budget and beyond. Our businesses need to and are ready to compete regionally and globally and will welcome the partnership with the City of Windsor in creating a more competitive business environment.

Thank you for your time this evening.