

2010 Budget Submission to City Council
September 30, 2009
Tom Davies Square

Mr. Chair, your Worship, Councillors, Ladies and Gentlemen; thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. I am speaking from a prepared statement tonight as we publish all of our public discourse to our website.

My name is André Dumais and I am the first vice-chair of the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce. I bring to you a very different message from my counterparts.

Our association represents over 1,000 businesses and organizations of all sizes and sectors that collectively employ nearly 34,000 full time and part time employees from all parts of the city.

Over the years, the Chamber has had the privilege to participate in similar proceedings and we have witnessed some positive steps towards the inclusion of our previous suggestions – the most recent being the appointment of an Auditor General.

We have faith that continued collaboration will result in further progress.

However, in this short time we are allowed to present, I will briefly touch on a few key topics of concern to the Chamber of Commerce.

As we are well aware, the past year has presented a global economic and financial crisis unprecedented both in terms of its severity and high degree of synchronicity. Worldwide demand slumped and trade plummeted. Central banks aggressively cut interest rates to stimulate aggregate demand and provide much needed liquidity to kindle the flow of credit. Governments also committed substantial fiscal stimulus for an infrastructure campaign larger than anything since the Second World War. These steps have undoubtedly assisted in rebuilding confidence and economic activity, but should not distract us from preparing for a path back to fiscal discipline.

The old formula of reducing services, raising taxes and borrowing from capital reserves is not the solution. Simply put, the city must do all it can to seek out efficiencies and savings in order to avoid incurring debt when preparing this budget.

Failure to do so will reduce the municipality's ability to act in areas that are crucial to our long-term competitiveness – in particular, tackling high marginal property tax rates, fostering economic development and meeting the challenges posed by an aging population. Council must build confidence in the future and present a viable budget, one which balances investment with legacy. This will require significant program spending restraint and a commitment to foster a positive business environment.

We must lay the foundation for sustainable, long-term economic growth by addressing long-standing structural impediments that negatively affect the operation and capacity of businesses to operate efficiently. This entails eliminating overlapping regulations and minimizing tax administration and licensing costs for business start ups. This budget must pursue measures that promote entrepreneurship, saving and investment, stimulate technological progress and boost productivity among city staff.

These guiding principles will ensure that Greater Sudbury's economy further develops as a dynamic and flexible community, capable of readily adjusting and adapting to economic shocks and circumstances.

My last point is in regards to economic diversification and the need to sustain funding while working to ease the administrative burdens associated with relocating or developing a business here in Greater Sudbury. In these times of economic malaise, the capacity to encourage and foster Economic Development is a crucial component that can significantly alleviate the consequences of a stagnant economy and strengthen the path for future private sector growth.

To that end, while there has been a clear trend over the last 5 years toward appealing for new economic activity in place of the historic, larger employers, Greater Sudbury nevertheless remains disproportionately affected by sector specific swings.

For instance, one approach to advance economic diversification may be to develop an inventory listing available Brownfield land - we may miss opportunities because of this as employers may skip over Greater Sudbury to neighbouring communities who promote the redevelopment of these serviced lots through grants or tax credits. Instituting a comprehensive inventory and corresponding grant and tax credit program would encourage business investment and undoubtedly contribute to the city's strategic long term plans to increase densification and nurture urban renewal.

In closing, the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce is asking Council to focus on creating sustainable opportunities for employment growth in Greater Sudbury. By creating business-friendly policies that encourage organizations to move here, or existing companies to grow their business, we can guarantee a strong future for our great city.

The Chamber truly believes that the City of Greater Sudbury is on the cusp of an historic period of renewal. We are facing some important decisions – decisions that will undoubtedly affect the future of our city citizens and businesses alike. Let's recognize that opportunity and move forward together.

Mr Chair, Mayor Rodriguez and Councillors, on behalf of the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce membership, I thank you for your time and look forward to seeing the results of these proceedings when the 2010 Budget is passed.