



Working with you towards a better Ontario

Mayor Joe Dominick

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Thank you Chamber board, members and citizens for the opportunity to update you on the state of the city.

I would like to introduce the team that helps me do my job. It takes more than one person to effectively run a city. Your city councilors are here today. Council President Norm Crume, Councilor Charlotte Fugate, Councilor Ron Verini, Councilor Dan Jones, Councilor Jack Fox and Councilor David Sullivan.

There is also many of our city staff members here, that are part of the team as well. Your City Manager Henry Lawrence, Finance Director Rachel Hopper, Chief of Police Mark Alexander, Public Works Director Chuck Mickelson, Park and Rec Director Kathy Daly. Last but definitely not least, the person that keeps the council running correctly, City Clerk Tori Barnett.

If I were to sum up in a phrase the state of our city, it would be "forging ahead." We are encountering obstacles, but the community of Ontario is great. Businesses helping citizens, friends helping friends. Even with the economy not at its best, everyone continues to be generous, making community projects successful.

Because Ontario is so great, we all continue forging ahead in our efforts to grow and advance the City of Ontario and the surrounding community.

The city budget and growth are the top two issues that everyone wants to know about. The city's operating budget is balanced, however, like all public budgets, it has challenges. City Manager Henry Lawrence and department staff have reprioritized and streamlined expenses, pushing the operating budget into its best position in recent years, while still providing a high level of service. We continue to do our best to maintain the contingency fund of slightly over \$1 million, which allows the Council to stay prepared for unexpected expenses.

While the operating budget is currently stable, there are two issues that pose real concern – the Aquatic Center and the state public employees retirement system.

The State of Oregon is requiring the City of Ontario taxpayers to pay an additional 25%, or nearly \$173,500 per year, to cover the state shortfall in the public employees retirement system. This is in addition to the \$670,000 that the city currently pays each year for city employee's retirement. This will be a direct reduction of funds in all accounts, adding to the budget challenges.

The community has told the council, "keep the Aquatic Center open." Built in 1983, the facility is aging and needs upgrading. We hired a consulting company to assess what the facility needs to continue into the future. While the overall structure is sound, over \$1 million was identified in immediate needs, including renovation to the infrastructure – heating, cooling systems, plumbing, boilers, remodel dressing rooms, a new roof, etc.

A complete renovation and redesign for a modern Aquatic Center will cost over \$2 million. This is a community asset that will have to be addressed by all citizens, in the very near future, as the city budget does not have funds available.

These are just two "immediate" issues of the many, that the budget board and council will be tackling in a couple of months. Along with other issues, we would like to hear your input on these matters.

Growth in Ontario. This is an area that I'm frustrated about. As hard as we work to convince businesses to locate here, we also face the issue of a state and national economy that is struggling. Statewide, new or expanding business growth and development is near a standstill. The same is true for our local area. Small business owners continue working towards success, hoping that new taxes and laws will not hamper their efforts to succeed.

There are pockets of recent business growth, such as the expansion of Jolts and Juice, and Diamond Gallery, as well as few new small businesses, such as Sticky Buns and Things, Ontario Crossfit Training, Mama Mia Take and Bake Pizza, and the newest addition to our community Flyboy's Coffee.

Over the last 4 years, let us not forget those excellent businesses that have grown and located in our beautiful city. Such as Hometown Toyota's expansion, Holiday Inn Express beautiful new 110 room hotel, Carl's Jr., Walgreens, Rite Aid, Edge Performance Sports, the Tuttle Office Complex, Ontario Life Flight, Love's Truck Plaza, Aaron's Furniture Store. I know I have missed a few, and we thank them also.

The city is currently in discussion to bring a data center to Ontario, however economic and corporate funding issues are hampering its progress. We are in constant contact with the company, and they are optimistic that prospects will develop within the next few months.

While we continually work towards locating new business within Ontario, we also focus on our partnerships with other agencies in our city.

By partnering with ODOT, North Oregon Street, once Ontario's worst, but now our best street, has been completed. The project was funded with federal stimulus money, and was completed on time.

ODOT is also helping the city find a solution for the traffic problem on the North Interchange by Loves Truck Stop. The city has petitioned to have the speed reduced, and is discussing what other measures can be implement to make that intersection safer. No, the decision of a roundabout has not been made, it is just one of the ideas being discussed for improved safety.

Plans are nearly complete for the Washington Street project. This will realign the corner at the end of North Oregon Street, creating better traffic flow, and increased safety. This \$4.5 million project is funded thru the state fuel taxes, with thanks to Rep. Cliff Bentz, for securing the dollars from the state.

We still have to address the 75 year old underpass. With help from Oregon Senator Ron Wyden, we received a federal grant of \$290,000 to assess its condition, remaining life expectancy, and what it will take to improve its condition. The assessment will take about a year, and then we can begin securing funding to repair it.

Ontario is working with the State of Oregon, on a \$4.2 million upgrade to the airport. Plans are complete, and ready for bids, on a full resurface of the runway, and taxiways. Thanks to FAA grants and Connect Oregon 3 grant dollars, the project will be completed early to mid July this year. Thank you also to our Airport Manager Alan Daniels for working hard to aquire this grant.

Our new 5-bay fire department substation has been completed and is now in operation. It was funded in partnership with the Rural Fire Board, built on time by a local company, within budget, and is located out by the airport, across from Lifeflight. If you haven't done so, I encourage you to call city hall, and make an appointment to tour this fine facility.

In conjunction with a partnership between TVCC and the Capt John W. Brown Armory, Ontario is now home to a state-of-the-art, solar array, providing power for the Armory, as well as the Idaho Power grid, and providing training for future jobs. Congratulations to TVCC Pres Dana Young, Major General Raymond Rees, and Abby Lee of TVCC for their highly successful Energy Summit. Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber joined the summit to officially start the solar array.

We are also continuing to move forward on the Downtown Revitalization Project, which was started with grant money. Studies are complete, and a plan is in place. We have applied for a \$1.5 million grant to repair and replace the street and sidewalks.

I want to acknowledge and thank one of our businesses – Andrew Seed. Even though the revitalization grant isn't secured yet, Andrew Seed is taking a step forward, making downtown more attractive with their "potted plant project." Andrews Seed is matching a grant from the Ontario Visitors and Convention fund to place pots of colorful plants downtown. I hope you will join them to bring color and beauty to downtown by sponsoring a potted plant.

I encourage all other Ontario businesses to join in, and implement your ideas to make our city a better, more vital place to work and live.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a great city with good citizens and businesses. Though we're forging ahead, there will always be obstacles to overcome. Thank you everyone for partnering with the City of Ontario, moving it forward, making it a great place to work and live. Your help is invaluable to our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as Mayor, and thank you for making Ontario the best city in Oregon to live.