

Notes for an address
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to the 6th Annual Brownfields Conference
Canadian Brownfields 2005: Developing Livable Communities

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Thank you very much Jeff Westeinde. It's good to be back. I remember that my first formal meeting with you was about a year ago when I was a relatively recently minted new minister. I can say that over the year, as I have continued my travels across the country in communities large and small, it has become even more evident to me how integral brownfields development is for the quality of life of this country. The events that have taken place over the course of the year – and, I'll make some illusion to that in a minute – have simply reinforced the urgency of getting on with the task. In other words, I'm very much seeing brownfields as part of both the strategy for infrastructure in Canada and also the New Deal for Cities and Communities. I also get the sense, both from last year and from just seeing all of you here today that there is extraordinary momentum building behind this concept but a lot of frustration still remains and I'm sure you're going to be getting into the detail of that frustration.

I've have no doubt that the potential in brownfields is not just for greener and safer communities, but it's also key to business success, it's key to our economic agenda, to downtown revival for increased property values, and it's also absolutely essential for the revitalization of decayed neighbourhoods. I was in Calgary the other day walking around with Mayor Bronconnier looking at the potential for the Rivers Project, which will require a great deal of remediation and you could just feel the excitement of the potential of that location as it is right by city hall.

I also think that if we handle brownfields sensitively, if we pick up on the themes of what used to be there before and not simply have some kind of bland solution, we can capture that wonderful word in German, "heimat" which translates, rather superficially as homeland, but actually is about the distinctive sense of place. When we were at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) conference in St. John's, Newfoundland in June this spring, I remember seeing a new project which was on an old industrial site where the themes of the warehouses had been picked up by the new buildings. And so the sense of place, the sense of history, the sense of "heimat" was captured through the particularly sensitive treatment of the site.

When we capture that sense of place, we really remind ourselves why we choose to live in one set of communities, or one community rather than another, and I think brownfields development is an essential part of that. I also think that the events of this summer, the trifecta if you will of high energy prices; 44 smog days in southern Ontario; and the crisis of the electrical system which has been flirting with crashing in southern Ontario over the summer as the demand exceeds 25,000 megawatts, enhance the sense of the interaction between climate change and extreme weather events which we noted in places like New Orleans with Katrina. They add to that sense of urgency I referred to at the beginning of this talk. If we don't start to take action now, which lead to greater urban density, which inevitably involves looking at brownfield sites, we really will pay for it as a civilization for our lack of attention and that's what Mother Nature is doing right now by sending us some pretty severe warning systems. This summer really put all of us on alert.

Well we're pretty good at asking some questions about the future, but I think what we need to be proud of is that this brownfields way, this momentum, this movement that you're part of is really part of this larger agenda of smart growth. It is a response to the criticism, which is so apparent, of unmitigated urban sprawl, it is giving us the potential to produce new models downtown of potentially business districts that are regionally and indeed internationally competitive. Districts that are once again sensitive to the inherent value of the site and, in many cases, to the architectural legacy.

It's also clear that what we're looking at here are new strategies for financing investments and managing liabilities. Over the course of the year, I've been meeting people from the private sector who not only are asking how government can change the regulations that would make life easier in terms of risk mitigation, but what are the financing tools, what are the new ways of understanding that.

And finally, in the larger debate about municipalities finding new forms of financing – brownfields mitigation – will be a trigger for things like TIFS, for example, going back to Calgary where the mayor is going to construct the whole district around the rivers, with tax incremental financing. Brownfields blend themselves particularly to this kind of development. And I know that present today are many of the people in organizations who have been instrumental in the effort to build the momentum.

I see people here from the National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE) who have to be recognized for their role in producing the report, *Cleaning up the Past, Building the Future*, because this has become the template for the discussion of how an overall response to brownfields could work. They have laid out the fundamental questions. I'm not sure we've answered them as expeditiously as we should have, but they've said what the problem is.

I also want to congratulate the Canadian Urban Institute. Of course one of the things about both of these organizations is that they all have people called Glen Murray who run them as far as I can judge. You know, Glen is Chair of the NRTEE, then you move over to the Canadian Urban Institute and there is Glen as one of the Vice Presidents. So I want to recognize Glen's role in all of this. I know that the Canadian Urban Institute is the host of this conference and I want to recognize as well all of the other partners in the Canadian Brownfields Network and the way in which both the NRTEE and the Network have worked together and worked on us to advance the cause.

I also want to recognize as well, the private sector, the people who do take the risks, who put their own dollars on the line and it does take a certain amount of courage to be a pioneer in this field and I'm glad that the Canadian Brownfields Network has created the Brownie Awards to recognize those who have been particularly courageous and creative. And I really want to emphasize that, as we move forward, it's going to be crucial to maintain this dialogue and partnership between the government and the private sector so that we're sensitive as we slowly try and implement the recommendations made by groups like the NRTEE, that we're not inadvertently doing ourselves in on some other front.

You're not alone in the field of course in terms of the support that the federal government has to offer. As you know, we've invested in Sustainable Development Technology Canada, to work with the private sector on soil remediation technologies. And those of you who are intimately involved in this will know that the first request for proposals went out this fall which means that over time, more communities will have a chance to have their innovation, their innovative proposals funded and more sites across Canada will ultimately be cleaned up.

You will also know that through the FCM, we have invested 300 million dollars in the Green Municipal Funds and 150 million dollars has been targeted specifically at brownfields. And I'm proud and pleased to say that the FCM has recently opened the first request for proposals for the brownfields funds. This is exactly the kind of example I was referring to earlier where you can see the integration of the brownfields strategy with the New Deal for Cities and Communities.

We know about places like Welland and Montreal, where I'm going later this afternoon to visit some of these sites, and Calgary which I was just referring to. So it's taken a while to get going on the brownfields funds, but it's nice to see that we're actually starting to roll out and we hope to see the results of the FCM application process early in 2006.

So as I indicated, we view the brownfields strategy as a crucial component of our overall New Deal for Cities and Communities. Just to remind you, the New Deal taken in it's largest sense is really about the four pillars of sustainability. Not just the triple bottom line of society, economy, environment but adding in that fourth dimension of culture, of creativity, of heritage. And as I've gone across the country over the

year and a half that I've had something to do with this file, I've certainly seen up close and personal the potential for what we can do here.

And I realize that if the New Deal for Cities and Communities does nothing else, it asks of every community, particularly in the context of the sharing of the gas tax money, what is your vision for the future. Where do you want this place to be in 30 years time? What are your dreams and how can we sustain those dreams? And what are your dreams particularly in the light of the tremendous pressures which I referred to earlier, the energy pressures, the climate pressures, the extreme weather event pressures. Let me just do a little update of the New Deal: money.

As you may recall, we announced that we would be investing 5 billion dollars of federal gas tax revenues in environmentally sustainable municipal infrastructure over the course of five years. This has involved signing individual agreements with provinces, territories and ultimately First Nations. So far we've signed eight gas tax agreements which now cover something like 90 per cent of the Canadian population and we're working on finishing off the remainder of those deals as quickly as possible.

So as a result of that, Canadian communities who will sign on with us through their municipal associations or through their provinces are now able to do a few things that they have said were important. One is to have stable, predictable, long-term financing for certain kinds of investments, and these investments are leading to cleaner air and water, and the reduction of greenhouse gases. We hope that they will lead to better and safer communities.

Because the money is on the table for five years and indefinitely thereafter in the words of the Finance Minister, we hope that that kind of long-term commitment will in turn lead to longer term reflection by those communities about the footprint that they wish to build their communities on, about what their population will look like 30 years hence. Last week in a piece of legislation which deals with, which deals actually with the energy crisis, the Finance Minister confirmed that the 400 million dollars a year, which we made available for urban transit over a two-year period for a total of 800 million dollars, which was originally contingent on there being budget surpluses, is now non conditional. There will be that additional amount of eight hundred million dollars. So that means the municipalities can add that to the money as they make their long-term investments in this crucial area of urban transit.

What has not been, I think, fully understood about the New Deal is that it has three dimensions in terms of the gas tax. First, it must be invested in categories which we refer to as environmentally sustainable municipal infrastructure: things like urban transit, water projects that pay for themselves, new garbage disposal systems and for some small communities, the rehabilitation of roads and bridges, community energy systems. Then we ask that those investments over a five-year period be linked to certain outcomes: cleaner air, cleaner water, a reduction of greenhouse gases.

But the final piece is that, in exchange for federal dollars, we're asking every community to produce an integrated community sustainability plan which doesn't just talk about the environmental components, but refers to the other three pillars as well. So it's a four pillar strategy which works with communities to think about the 30-year future and works with provinces to make sure that we're reinforcing the policy choices which, in the case of Ontario for example, would be about things like the Places to Grow strategy and the Greenbelt legislation.

What I would encourage each of you to do in the communities you come from is to figure out, in the context of this long-term, integrative planning, where brownfields fit in, because clearly it must be at the core of any strategy for sustainability. And this is on top of the work and the money that Environment Canada has put into contaminated sites which is to put 3.5 billion dollars to work to clean up the legacy of many of our abandoned mines, military sites and toxic waste depots. So I guess the question is, how do we keep the momentum going, and also recognize that we need to keep that sense of urgency as well.

This is not an abstract question for me. As it was eluded to by Jeff, I have been tracking how this works out up close and personal across my constituency office. Some of you may have heard the story before, but when I was first elected in 1993, on one side of Laird Drive, were all the houses where the workers

and managers were to live and on the other side was originally an air strip which became an industrial site, particularly during the Second World War, sort of an arsenal for democracy.

A lot of very heavy stuff went in there. But gradually over the course of time, there was pressure from the neighbours, the usual story about heavy industrial sites and gradually these places were abandoned. And I guess the moral of the story as I lived it was that, first of all, you can come up with a great idea. We decided that what should go in there was called new media village; we tried to capture a new economic wave and really encourage all that sort of thing to happen. But what actually happened of course was big box retail and more residential.

Now that's not all together bad, but the one lesson I derived from it as I look out on what seems to be a misplaced mall from Santa Fe, New Mexico full of all sorts of architectural curly cues and pastel colours, and general odysseys, is that had there been a more purposeful reflection on the site in terms of an integrated strategy of simply not being driven by circumstance and by frankly, the developers, we could have done a superb job in making that a kind of showcase community.

And what's happened is that various forces have taken over and developed it according to the particular interests of particular property owners. So I'm very much in favour of long-term thinking and fairly rigorous planning for these sites because they can be okay or they can be terrific, but terrific is always better than okay. In other words, planning, planning, planning and the role of brownfields within that planning has got to be part of what we're all about.

Now there are some other tremendous examples where I think things have worked a lot better, where there has been a kind of integrity of design. One of the things I have in my portfolio as a Crown Corporation is Canada Lands Company and in a recent trip to Calgary, I went out to look at Garrison Woods. I don't know if any of you are from Calgary, but here's a brownfields site, an old military base where a tremendous amount of common sense and sensitivity has gone into an integrated plan.

It really is a reflection of the new urbanism and the way in which retail and residential and the parts of the past that could be rescued including the trees, so they kind of wobble the streets around some of the trees, is a showcase for how to do these things. It's now become literally a showcase in terms of sustainable development. And we have the potential here in Ottawa as well. There's this extraordinary site, the Rockcliffe Base which also now belongs to the Department of National Defence and we hope will be coming over fairly quickly to Canada Lands where we could try and bring in all of the latest technologies of energy saving.

I'm going to Benny Farm this afternoon to see how they managed, in that old veterans housing complex in Montreal, to built in all of the energy saving devices that are available to us. And that's what we ought to be doing, whether we're doing it as Government of Canada, as developer or whether we're doing it as private sector or as towns and cities. And there are also neat provincial examples. And I like the ones where municipalities get involved and start thinking about local projects.

So right around the country there's some neat things happening and I think we should always try and figure out how to get the best out of these sites, not just the okay. And I'm glad to hear that you've got people from the United Kingdom and the United States and from my trips recently to the United States, I think we've got a lot to learn there too.

There's no better time than now to build on what you've been doing and what we've been doing, and if I haven't already said it, it seems to me that one of the great advantages of a brownfields strategy is the multiple benefit dimension to it that we not only do a good thing in terms of energy and neighbourhood renewal, we also do a good thing in terms of more jobs and test revenues and cleaner and safer communities. So what I'm hoping we can do, you and I and all of us who are in this game, is to link things like the FCM and the Green Municipal Fund and Canada Lands to be more purposeful and expeditious in rolling out brownfield sites. And I know that I'm preaching to the converted here.

So as we go forward, it becomes crucial that we continue to develop the ideas that leverage the most possible benefits for our cities and communities in this purposeful way I've described; that we link with provincial and territorial ministers responsible for brownfields. We clearly have a way to go and I would be the first to recognize this in leading the recommendations which were put forward on some of these more technical issues by the NRTEE and I'm encouraged by the report of the Canadian Council, the ministers of environment which makes reference to all of this.

The private sector has got to keep forging ahead. They do a great job. I'm thinking of things here like the Canadian Homebuilders Association which is delivering the message and taking it out to the wider community in terms of making these investments attractive. So in closing, let me say I understand that the Canadian Brownfields Network is hosting a technical conference later in the fall on brownfields and I hope this will keep the momentum moving and I hope that when we meet again in a year's time, we'll have much to celebrate. Thank you very much.