

**Speech from Graham Saul, Chair of Ecology Ottawa
to the Ecology Ottawa Annual Dinner
November 10th, 2011**

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Thank everyone for coming tonight.

For Ecology Ottawa, the Annual Dinner is a special night. It is a night that we come together and we celebrate.

For Ecology Ottawa we are celebrating three things in particular.

First - we are celebrating not only the fact that we as a community are together tonight, but we are also recognizing and celebrating the amazing potential that is represented in this room to make this city a better place.

I hope you took advantage of the reception to mix and mingle because the people in this room represent a powerful and transformative force, including representatives from:

- **a range of national organizations** – such as the David Suzuki Foundation, Oxfam, Nature Canada and many more. These folks are fighting every day to make the country and the world a better place, and Ecology Ottawa provides them with a venue where they can also support strong local municipal action.
- **labour unions** – including our brothers and sisters from the Canadian Labour Congress and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.
- **cutting edge businesses** – including representatives from the environment committee of the Ottawa chamber of commerce and companies such as Marbek, Clearly Solar, Stratos, Delphi, Isolara Solar Power, as well as the more than 40 restaurants that are sponsoring our dinner tonight. These are the kinds of businesses that stood up for the green energy and green economy act in the recent election and are changing business as usual every day.
- **friends from city hall and provincial politics** –including Minister Meilleur, Centretown Ottawa-Centre NDP candidate Anil Naidoo, Mayor Watson, and city councilors, Keith Egli, David Chernoshenko, Diane Holmes, Rick Chiarelli.
- and we have other **local organization** that like Ecology Ottawa, who are focused on moving the city in the right direction - Sustainable Living Ottawa East, the Ottawa Renewable Energy Coop, Ottawa Sustainability Fund, Ottawa Hospital, Envirocentre, Tucker House, Community Energy Network of Eastern Ontario, 1000 Solar Rooftops initiative.

For Ecology Ottawa, this is a night that we can surround ourselves with our friends and celebrate the community that we are part of in this great city. And we can be thankful that you are all out there doing what you do every day.

The second reason we celebrate here tonight is because we are celebrating the growing grassroots movement that is Ecology Ottawa, and that includes in one way or another, most of the people in this room.

It also includes:

- our staff.
- the outreach canvass that is out there knocking on thousands of doors every month talking to people about Ecology Ottawa.
- the more than 1000 people across the city that have donated to Ecology Ottawa over the past year.
- and the almost 6000 people who receive our action alerts and updates every couple of weeks.

It's important to remember that we only got started as an organization towards the end of 2006, just after Mayor O'Brien got elected:

Since then we've developed a volunteer base of almost 400 people across the city, and it is these volunteers that have made possible the work that Ecology Ottawa has done over the past five years possible.

When the ten or so people that founded Ecology Ottawa little more than five years ago came together we made two promises to ourselves.

First, that in the midst of all of the brilliant work that people across this city were doing at the federal and international level, Ecology Ottawa was going to focus on making the City a healthier, more vibrant, ecologically responsible and prosperous place.

Second, that every dollar we raised, every staff person that we hired, every strategy we developed would be dedicated to engaging the incredible volunteer energy that is out there. We promised ourselves that Ecology Ottawa would always be a volunteer led organization whose core mission is to help build a city-wide movement that bring Ottawans together to push for the values and vision that we have in common

We have a long way to go, but tonight is a night where we celebrate both the vibrant community that surrounds us and the hundreds of volunteers that make Ecology Ottawa a growing movement across this city.

So let's give our volunteers a huge round of applause and celebrate their contribution tonight.

And the third reason why we celebrate tonight, is to celebrate a common vision for making this City the green capital of Canada.

What do I mean by common vision and what do I mean by “the green capital of Canada”? If I asked any one of you what your priorities were for this city, I bet I'd get a slightly different answer out of each one of you.

But I also know that at its core we share a vision for this great city that unites us. That vision is grounded in common values that are shared throughout the community represented here today.

We are tired of the waste that seems to be built into every aspect of our lives and we want a society that is based around the concept of zero waste. Instead of burying or burning waste every day, we want to move towards a place where everything we don't use directly can be recycled or composted. Where cradle to cradle is our objective not cradle to a wasteful grave.

The city of Vancouver has set a goal of zero waste, and we believe that the City of Ottawa should be working to beat Vancouver to it.

We share a love for the rivers and waterways that define this city. We want them protected and restored. In short, we want Ottawa to have the cleanest water of any major city in Canada.

So in the coming months we'll be looking to our provincial and federal representatives to deliver their support for the Ottawa River Action Plan so that we can stay on the path towards cleaner water.

We'll also be looking to City Council to continue to adopt strategies to limit runoff during heavy rain events by promoting green roofs, increasing permeable surfaces and planting tree cover.

And speaking of trees, the vision and the values that unite us includes a love for the woods and marshes that surround this city.

We want to ski, snow shoe, bike and hike those trails, not pave over them or build on top of them. We want a city that cherishes and restores, not degrades and tramples over, its green spaces and natural habitat.

Ottawa could be famous for having world class park space, we've already laid the foundation, and we want our children to be proud of the natural heritage that we've left behind.

We also share a vision of a world class local agricultural system. Ottawa is the size of Paris with only 10 per cent of Paris's population. Agricultural revenue in the City of Ottawa is greater than that of Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Edmonton and Calgary combined,

We have the potential to become a global model for local and healthy food, like the food that is on your table tonight.

About a tenth of all farms in the Ottawa-Gatineau region are already organic -- a rate higher than the provincial averages for both Ontario and Quebec, so Ottawa is already well positioned to develop the best local organic food system in the world.

We also share a vision of an Ottawa that has the cleanest air in the world. We don't want our children gasping for breath because of asthma. We're appalled by the notion that we have to be told to stay inside and not exert ourselves on hot days because the very air we breathe is dangerous.

Perhaps most importantly, because this relates to almost everything else, we want a city that sets a goal to break our addiction to oil, coal and natural gas. If we want clean air, if we want to insulate ourselves from rising energy prices, and if we want to do our fair share to avoid catastrophic climate change, we need to set a clear long-term goal of getting off fossil fuels.

We know that cities will need a lot support from the provincial and federal government to achieve meaningful greenhouse gas reductions, but metropolitan areas generate more than 70 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions and cities have direct control over many of the most important sources of greenhouse gas pollution.

That's why Ottawa should establish, as a clear guiding light, a commitment to eliminating fossil fuels by 2050. Vancouver has committed to eliminating fossil fuels by 2040 and Stockholm is aiming to be fossil fuel free by 2050. We can do this, but we have to set the long-term direction and begin taking immediate action.

Land-use patterns are one of the single most important determinants of people's greenhouse gas emissions. That means that we need to hold the line on the urban boundary and build complete communities – communities that have a mix of housing types, jobs, schools, daycares, shopping, and recreational opportunities all within a ten-minute walk. Communities where people rarely need cars and when they do, most trips will be shorter. Done right, these are safe, vibrant, people-centred communities that are beautiful and healthy places to live and work.

Getting off fossil fuels also means setting the clear goal of making walking, cycling and public transit the preferred transportation options.

Ottawa's city boundaries encompasses a downtown core and 25 separate villages, so that means we need to work on not only building compact town centres that are bustling with pedestrians and cyclists, but it also means that those town-centres need to be connected by a world class public transit system. And that means moving forward with the rapid expansion of a light-rail system in Ottawa and making our existing buses more affordable and more convenient.

But at the end of the day, most greenhouse gas emissions will come from existing buildings over the next decade. **So lets make Ottawa a leader in green building design and construction.** That means we need to push for requiring energy efficient retrofits when a building is sold and

when renovation permits are being issued and we need to be prepared to champion and pilot innovative approaches such as “On-Bill Financing” or “Pay as You Save” programs that help people invest in improving the efficiency of their current homes and allows them to repay the investments over time through their energy bills or property taxes.

Getting off fossil fuels also means making a medium-term commitment that all new buildings will be net zero carbon. We need to move rapidly towards adopting measures that encourage green building across the city.

Furthermore, as we phase out our dependence on oil, coal and gas we are going to need to ramp up our access to clean renewable energy. Ontario’s feed-in tariff program is perhaps the best policy in North America when it comes to promoting the clean energy revolution and it is critical that Ottawa becomes a leader in the uptake of renewable energy.

We live in a highly competitive, highly mobile, modern world, and the elements that make a community healthy also make it wealthy. Functionally, a compact, efficient city with a well-organized transportation system and a light environmental footprint, is cheaper to run and easier to maintain. And the bright, creative people who are the key to conceiving and expanding a globally competitive economy also gravitate to the most desirable – most livable – cities.

In this sense, everything that I’ve discussed here tonight can also be directly linked to making Ottawa both an environmental leader and a prosperous city. The kinds of things that we want to see happen are good investments in the future of the city, with dividends in the form of better health, a more resilient economy and a vibrant environment. The air will be cleaner, our homes more comfortable, and it will be easier to get around town. Everyone who lives, works, plays, studies in or visits Ottawa will share the benefits.

- Green buildings will inspire the next generation of architects, designers, engineers and building professionals.
- Building and operating the public transit infrastructure will create thousands of jobs.
- Initiatives to boost the production of local food, plant tens of thousands of new trees, install a thousand solar rooftops, increase recycling and composting, and use water more responsibly will all create green jobs and help the local economy.

But we want to build this city not just because it is a recipe for a vibrant, healthy and prosperous place, but because it will cost more not to act than it does to deal with the problem and build the city that we want. Our failure to act would place the entire burden of responding to climate change on our children and grandchildren and it would leave them to deal with the problems of dirty air and water.

In closing, for Ecology Ottawa, we celebrate this night because we are surrounded by a community of fellow-travelers from across the city who are working to make this common vision a reality every day. We celebrate tonight because it is an opportunity to thank the hundreds of Ecology Ottawa volunteers who make our growing movement possible. And we

celebrate tonight because we share a common vision for building a vibrant, prosperous, healthy and ecologically responsible city.