

Speaking notes for Marc Lauzon, Mayor of Deux-Montagnes
Press Conference on January 9th at 2:30 p.m.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to wish everyone a happy new year. May 2013 bring health, peace and happiness to you all.

In November 2005, the citizens of our city granted me the great privilege of representing them as Mayor.

At the time, I had announced that my goal was to serve two terms. I was aware of the challenges that lay ahead, and I was determined to devote all of my energy to improving the quality of life of our citizens and ensuring our city's future.

My first term in office was thoroughly enjoyable. Our main challenge was to ensure the city's future. To this end, we would have to generate new revenues, control rising costs, maintain services and improve them where possible and, last but not least, regain the trust of our citizens. To add to it all, we would have to accomplish all this at a time when revenue from construction was minimal.

In an effort to ensure a bright future for the city, we set out to save hundreds of thousands of dollars through the reorganization and relocation of a number of municipal services.

Sound decisions were made. Think of when we moved the Municipal Joint Court into the building that once housed the Caisse Desjardins. Bear in mind that a five-year lease was costing us more than the value of the building!

The relocation of the Municipal Court, and its merger with the Municipal Court of Saint-Eustache, have resulted in significant yearly savings, as does renting the Deux-Montagnes railway station building to a daycare.

And let us not forget the relocation of the municipal pound to the Public Works site, which saved us all a lot of money.

The geographic relocation of the Recreation Department, Clerk's Office and Urban Planning department was also undertaken in an effort to increase the effectiveness of our services and generate savings for the city.

We also launched a plan for the city's future. With the help of the Société d'habitation du Québec, who provided funds for social housing, we began Phase II of the Manoir Grand-Moulin. We acquired land on Oka Road and formed a citizens' committee charged with developing a plan for its revitalization.

We updated the website and overhauled the municipal bulletin, *L'Express*, in order to keep our citizens as well-informed as possible. In the interest of transparency, we held regular public information sessions in which all citizens were invited to take part.

What I remember most from my first term is how much I enjoyed meeting outstanding citizens: city enthusiasts, positivists and dedicated volunteers who devoted their time and

energy to the well-being of their community. These people helped me gain a deeper appreciation of citizen participation.

But this was not the only thing that I discovered in my time as Mayor. I humbly accept criticism for decisions taken between November 2005 and October 2013—each one of which was made in the interest of the people—but I refuse to allow myself and my team be made to bear responsibility for those decisions taken in the 90s, especially as some of those decisions continue to have a negative impact on our future.

Take for example the rezoning of industrial land along Highway 640 to residential land in 1990. This was probably the worst decision ever made in terms of the city's future, because that land was the perfect location for an industrial park. Not only would an industrial park have generated two to three times more revenue than what we currently generate, it would also have served as a sound buffer for neighbouring homes.

Unfortunately, it seems as though our predecessors opted for fast money. They subdivided the sector into hundreds of narrow strips for the construction of small homes, with no local shops, no sound barrier and no proper snow removal in the winter. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in recurring revenue were lost, with no additional services gained, and people have been bothered by the incessant highway noise ever since.

A more appropriate management strategy would have been to seek out government grants for the construction and revitalization of the Manoir Grand-Moulin and other municipal infrastructure, especially considering the generous and widely available nature of government funding at the time.

The same logic applies to those efforts made to bring our sewer and water mains up to standard. Despite the availability of funding, my predecessors chose to ignore these opportunities, preferring to pave roads rather than maintain their foundations.

More than a decade of this approach to city development has brought us to where we are today: there is little land left to develop, no industrial sector and few commercial ventures.

These choices, made in another time, continue to affect our city's development. No citizen is immune to the effects. Certainly, our mandate would have been different had different decisions been made in the 90s.

But we cannot change the past. We are not magicians. There is no magic wand that allows us to refashion our city. We must deal with our current reality and try to make things better.

Although it may be too late to create an industrial park, we can still create vibrant hubs that will attract new businesses and families. We must make full use of our two train stations and our waterways to generate new revenues and to reduce the burden on our citizens.

It was with these goals in mind that I decided to pursue another term in the November 2009 election. I was, and still am, convinced that our city could recover, but I did not expect the kind of campaign that awaited us. The election period proved difficult, marked by much aggression. It took its toll on my family, but also on my councillor candidates and their families.

At that time, a wise man told me that the best way to oust an administration such as ours was to cast doubt on the Mayor's integrity, spread rumours, and create a climate of

distrust. Looking back on that campaign, I have a feeling that he was not the only one who knew this recipe!

Our team was elected with a majority, but the damage had been done. The climate of trust we had strived to build had been undermined. It was a very difficult term for my team. Nevertheless, we implemented a game plan to inform our citizens about our current situation and the options available to us. We organized the Citizens' Summit and set up citizens' advisory committees charged with the contemplation of our collective future. Their recommendations formed the basis for a review of our urban development plan.

We wanted to give new impetus to the city, to create a movement geared towards the redevelopment of certain areas, to exploit our competitive advantages. But in a built-up environment such as ours, any transformation runs the risk of disturbing the neighbours.

In the years my councillors and I have been in office, the city may not have developed as quickly as we would have liked, but several things have improved. Take for example our surface and underground infrastructures. They have been largely restored, and there is very little left to be done.

Our playing fields are no longer the laughingstock of visitors, or a source of embarrassment for our coaches. We have restored and improved the Legion's reception hall, the Maison des Citoyens, the filtration plant, wastewater treatment, neighbourhood parks, and a number of public areas and intersections.

Our city is greener, trees and perennials have been planted. In fact, ours is the first city to have created a nature reserve on our territory, a stretch of woodland preserved for generations to come. Plastic bags were banned to further protect the environment, and Horticultural Days were created to uplift our citizens.

All in all, we have been able to invest in efforts to preserve our assets and outside appeal, but it is much too early to declare victory.

We have tried to be as transparent as possible throughout the years. We had to be completely open for our citizens to become truly aware of our situation, our level of debt, our investment opportunities and our financial constraints.

Despite what critics may say, I do not regret the Board's decision to raise taxes. Although it did not make us many friends, it was the only way to preserve our quality of life and maintain our services.

We endeavoured to generate new revenues through residential densification, among other things, but without much success. Clearly, many citizens were not ready or willing to embrace this form of urban development.

Maybe we had the wrong approach. Maybe we did not successfully communicate the urgency of the situation. Nevertheless, I believe that we have inspired many of our citizens to start thinking about the issues. There is still much work to be done.

And so, after thoughtful consideration and the counsel of my family and my team, I inform you that I will not pursue another term as Mayor in the November 2013 election.

It is time for others to take over. In the coming months I will finish my term and continue, with members of the Board, to oversee city affairs and to keep citizens abreast of our situation and of the options available to us.

Being able to enjoy my work is important. Dealing with criticism is part of the job, but no one gets up in the morning with a desire to be hated. We have to be convinced that we are part of the solution.

In November 2013, it will be time for me to pass the torch. I will have had the pleasure of working with citizens who have devoted themselves to their work as city councillors. My teams have done a remarkable job over the last two terms. They are made up of extraordinary, honest and involved citizens of Deux-Montagnes who have invested time and energy in serving on the Board and various committees in addition to taking part in social and community activities. They have listened to and acknowledged their fellow citizens. They have acted as mediators and their advice has helped the city move forward. I thank them all.

I have also had the privilege of working with exceptional people who, by their professionalism, integrity and *joie de vivre*, have been instrumental in helping our city run smoothly. It is important that we not let their motivation wane.

It is possible that my actions, how I have dealt with the challenges we have faced, might have ruffled a few feathers. I assure you that I have always been motivated by a desire for justice and fairness.

As Mayor, one is sometimes required to put the needs of the community over the needs of the individual.

Am I right? Am I wrong? Only time will tell.

I hope my announcement this new year will encourage candidates to come forward and to bring more composure to City Council meetings.

These meetings have not been very pleasant lately, and my style probably has not helped matters much. Let us hope, for everyone's sake, that my announcement this afternoon does something to improve the atmosphere.

That said, I welcome constructive criticism, but I have a hard time accepting a lack of respect for others, bad faith and malice. And so it happens from time to time that I respond rather than let something go. I am not the kind of person who turns the other cheek—but believe me, I try.

Therefore, as of November 2013, I will return to life as an ordinary citizen. To conclude, allow me now to offer a few words of wisdom to the candidates and to all those who aspire to one day be Mayor:

Our situation will not change because I am retiring from municipal politics. The campaign will therefore not be about the Mayor. What it should be about is different ideas for the future of the city. I encourage candidates to do their homework well and to double-check their numbers. Everything is public and available. We have nothing to hide and our staff is at your disposal.

The upcoming campaign should focus on ideas and on the means available by which we can ensure the city's long-term fiscal health.

Some may believe that we would do well to merge with another city—that this would make all our problems disappear.

In my humble opinion, it is still possible and essential to generate new revenues in order to preserve the Ville de Deux-Montagnes that we know and love. There are changes to be made, groups to be formed and areas of the city to be redeveloped. This is the only way we can fulfill our duties, respect our citizens' ability to pay, and maintain quality of life.

There are a number of significant changes ahead, and the support of the public is vital if we are to meet this enormous challenge.

I therefore urge citizens to be vigilant during the next campaign because there is only one Santa Claus in Deux-Montagnes, the one we see each year in the Parade!

And so, future candidates, explain your motives, your vision, and focus on what matters most: ensuring the future and good governance of our city.

Thank you.