

2025 State of the City Address

Building on Strength, Planning for Growth

Mayor Ken Boshcoff, January 6, 2025 – Council Chambers

Good evening, members of City Council, distinguished guests, and residents of Thunder Bay.

This evening, as we gather in a city renowned for its natural beauty and cultural richness, on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe peoples, specifically the Fort William First Nation, signatories to the Robinson-Superior Treaty of 1850.

We honour the Anishinaabe's enduring stewardship of this land, rooted in respect and sustainability.

This land holds timeless stories, from the shores of Lake Superior to Anemki Wajiw and Nanabijou, reflecting the sacred bond between land and spirit.

As we move forward together as a community, may we do so with humility, an openness to learning, and with a commitment to truth and reconciliation.

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I am filled with pride and optimism for the progress we have made together.

Over the past year, our community has shown incredible resilience, celebrated meaningful successes, and built a strong foundation for an even brighter future.

Tonight, I am excited to reflect on the achievements of 2024 and share our vision for continued growth and prosperity in the year ahead.

From record-breaking infrastructure projects, to a thriving local business ecosystem, we've witnessed tangible progress across many sectors.

As Chair of the Mayor's Task Force on Building More Homes, I'm so excited to celebrate the amazing progress our city has made in building and improving infrastructure for our community!

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I am thrilled to share that our city has exceeded Ontario's housing targets for 2024!

This remarkable achievement reflects our community's commitment to tackling the housing crisis head-on.

By working with the Province to cut red tape, streamline our own development processes, and invest in affordability, we've not only met, but surpassed our goals.

A special thanks goes to the federal and provincial governments for their unwavering support, particularly through the:

- the Housing Accelerator Fund
- the Housing Enabling Water Systems Fund, and
- the Building Faster Fund.

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These initiatives provided crucial resources to accelerate construction, incentivize affordability, and foster collaboration with developers and non-profits.

The 20.7 million dollars in federal funding secured through the Housing Accelerator Fund helped pave the way for some major housing initiatives, including:

- Launching the remaining residential building permits online
 - Developing a city-wide Community Improvement Plan for housing
 - Updating zoning by-laws to encourage higher density, and
 - Introducing six new, innovative housing grant streams.

City-owned lands were also made available for development, further fueling housing progress.

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By year-end, we achieved a modern record of 345 new units towards our targets.

We completed nearly 6 thousand inspections, and issued 923 building permits with a construction value at almost 224 million dollars!

City Council also declared 14 City-owned properties surplus for housing, and advanced agreements for some major – and VERY exciting projects.

New businesses across the city opened their doors, infusing fresh energy into our neighbourhoods and proving that Thunder Bay is a city of opportunity.

Our economy saw growth in the mining, forestry, and energy sectors.

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Mining output rose by 15 per cent, creating over 12 hundred jobs through new mineral developments and advanced technologies.

The forestry sector also contributed 250 million dollars!

This was driven by value-added products and sustainable practices.

The City and the Community Economic Development Commission also worked on some important energy projects.

A plan was introduced to save energy and cut emissions.

This was part of the City's goal to reach net-zero emissions.

Through the dedicated efforts of the 'Plug-in Thunder Bay' program, we have successfully tripled the number of

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public electric vehicle charging stations in our community, bringing the total to 91.

This expansion is a key milestone in making Thunder Bay a more environmentally friendly and accessible community.

We also expressed support for Bill 165, the ‘Keeping Energy Costs Down Act’.

This legislation aims to make energy more affordable for residents and businesses, enhancing the local economic environment.

These achievements showcase Thunder Bay’s innovation and resilience, solidifying its position as a hub of growth and opportunity.

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2024 also marked the final year of the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot program, administered by the CEDC.

This program helped over 12 hundred newcomers settle and thrive in Thunder Bay.

Their contributions have strengthened our workforce, and enriched our community.

The 2024 Ontario Winter Games in February showcased the spirit of our city, uniting residents and visitors in celebration of our talents, culture, and friendly competitiveness.

I was so proud of our community – especially the hundreds of volunteers – that helped put on such a successful event.

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2024 also marked a record year for cruise shipping.

Thunder Bay saw over 61 hundred cruise ship passengers, with 16 local port calls, by four different ships.

This led to an economic impact of 4.3 million dollars.

Our tourism infrastructure saw continued investments, including waterfront upgrades and enhanced recreational spaces, solidifying Thunder Bay as a premier destination.

We also strengthened our relationships across sectors, working hand-in-hand with community organizations, businesses, and public agencies to tackle pressing challenges and seize new opportunities.

These collaborative efforts have been vital in addressing the evolving needs of our community.

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However, as we reflect on our progress, we are reminded of the persistent and pressing challenges that continue to shape our city's future.

Thunder Bay, like many other cities, is grappling with complex social and health issues, including homelessness, mental health, and addictions.

Our commitment remains steadfast:

We are working closely with community partners and calling on the provincial and federal governments to provide the resources necessary to address these crises.

Together, we are building solutions rooted in compassion, innovation, and collaboration.

As we look ahead to 2025, Thunder Bay's economic indicators are showing promising signs of growth.

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Our focus will remain on attracting investments, supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs, and creating a business-friendly environment that drives job creation.

In 2025, I am also focussing on stronger, grassroots engagement and open communication with residents.

I'll be sharing regular updates and using new ways to connect with you directly.

My goal is to keep you informed about what's happening in the city, and hear your concerns, ideas, and feedback.

As someone who has had the honour of serving this city over decades, it never ceases to amaze me at how truly fortunate we are to call Thunder Bay home.

In a world facing unprecedented challenges, we are privileged to live in a community that offers stability,

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opportunity, and natural beauty unmatched anywhere else.

Nestled on the beautiful shores of Lake Superior, we are a sanctuary of breathtaking landscapes.

From the rugged cliffs of the Sleeping Giant, to the tranquil waters of our countless lakes and rivers, we are surrounded by nature's finest gifts.

With over 13 hundred hectares of parkland, we enjoy one of the highest amounts of green space per capita in Canada.

This is a testament to our commitment to living harmoniously with the environment.

But our city is more than just a pretty picture.

It is also a hub of progress and connection.

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The Port of Thunder Bay and our International airport ensure we remain a vital gateway for trade and transportation, linking the Prairie provinces to global markets and connecting communities across Northwestern Ontario.

Our leadership in healthcare at the Health Sciences Centre, and innovation at Lakehead University and Confederation, further cement our role as a beacon of opportunity and excellence.

What I think makes Thunder Bay truly extraordinary though, is our people.

We are a multicultural, dynamic, and creative community that embraces both tradition and innovation.

A growing food scene, fueled by local ingredients and entrepreneurial spirit, showcases the richness of our culture.

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And being one of the lowest cost of living Canadian cities, we enjoy the freedom to spend more time and resources on what truly matters—family, community, and adventure.

As one of Canada’s sunniest cities, with over 22 hundred hours of sunshine annually, we can be reminded to see the bright side.

Our unique position in the heart of the continent gives us access to opportunities and connections that others can only dream of.

While the world grapples with immense difficulties, we are blessed to have a city where dreams can be pursued, and life can be lived to the fullest.

Together, let us cherish what we have, share our gifts with the world, and continue to build a future that reflects the very best of Thunder Bay.

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It is not only our home, but a shining example of what is possible when people, nature, and opportunity come together.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to our staff and administration for their dedication and efforts throughout 2024.

You make sure that our residents receive the exceptional city services they rely on every day.

Thank you for making a difference.

I also want to recognize and thank our new City Manager, John Collin, for his leadership since stepping into his role in June 2024.

Over the past six months, John has brought renewed focus and energy, while also driving progress and

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inspiring confidence in our organization’s future and abilities.

And of course, I also want to acknowledge the efforts of my colleagues on City Council.

Your dedication to building this community guides our collective prosperous and sustainable future.

Sharing this table with each of you underscores the importance of collaboration in serving the people of Thunder Bay.

Our shared commitment to addressing the needs of our citizens, and working toward common goals, is the foundation of a strong and vibrant community.

Let us build on the strength of what we have achieved, and plan boldly to maximize on the growth opportunity that lies ahead.

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Together, we will continue to make Thunder Bay a stronger, connected, and thriving community – AND a place we are all proud to call home.

Chi-miigwetch. Thank you.