

**Speaking Notes – Youth Forum Welcome**

**[AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY]**

Good morning everyone. I'm very glad to be here today and to be able to welcome you to the Youth Engagement Forum 2015, here at the Machine Shop at Mill Square.

To all the youths in attendance today, thank you very much for coming. If you are here with a school or a class, another thank you goes to your teachers for supporting the forum. If you happen to be playing hooky...well, tomorrow you can tell your principal or teacher that the Mayor asked them to go easy on you, because I think that is important for you to be here. In all seriousness though, I am very happy that all of you will be taking part. I think we have a really great and valuable day ahead of us.

It has taken a big effort to make this day possible. I'd like to thank the many sponsoring businesses and organizations for their generosity. I'd also like to thank all of the volunteers and organizers who have put forward their time and effort to make the forum happen.

In particular, I want to acknowledge the efforts of Jody Rebek who was the lead coordinator for the forum and helped pull everything together. Thank you Jody, and thank you to everyone on the organizing team for your work, and for making this awesome event possible.

Now, I know it is going to be a full day for everyone, so I don't want to take a lot of time with my remarks right now. But there are a few ideas I would like to leave you with before I step away from the microphone.

What I want to leave with you is this: this is your community. You have a stake in it. I hope you will be able to see yourselves having a future in it, having a path to happiness and fulfillment in it. I know some of you may not feel sure about that, and I'm going to be perfectly honest: it will take work to get there. There will be a role for me to play, and roles for people at different organizations around town. But there is a role for you too, if you want to accept it. And you can begin **today**.

Because creating positive change and being an engaged citizen — these are things that you don't have to wait for the perfect moment to start doing. You don't have to wait until you are 30, or 25. You don't have to wait until you buy a home and start paying taxes, or until you graduate college or university, or even until you are old enough to vote.

You can begin contributing today. You can make your voice heard today. You can start creating meaningful change today. Whatever age you are right now, whatever experiences you have or haven't had, you are already important. You already count. You already have a lot to offer to this community. And we are asking—I am asking— for your help.

So thank you again for joining us here. I think we can look forward to a day full of motivation, engagement, and many interesting discussions. And I'm looking forward to hearing what you have to say.