



MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, December 28, 2017

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Mayor Jeff Lehman's New Year's Message

(Barrie, ON) Those looking back on 2017 from a distance will likely remember this as a tumultuous year for the United States; a year when social media shaped society far more than any point in the past; a year of lost musical legends and the realization that some legends need retelling; a time of increasing prosperity but intensifying polarization.

For Barrie this was a year of records set, both for better and for worse. In March, house prices spiked to an all-time high of some \$600,000 for an average single detached home. We became the third most expensive city in Canada in which to rent an apartment, after only Vancouver and Toronto. Our unemployment rate dipped to an almost impossibly low 3.4% in November, the lowest ever recorded by StatsCan for Barrie.

Signs of tremendous strength in our local economy. Yet the rapid rise in the cost of housing put unprecedented pressure on household budgets, from working families to those struggling to make rent. And the strength of those job numbers hides the more precarious nature of work, and how quickly things can change in today's economy.

This year will also likely be remembered for the completion (at last) of the waterfront in Barrie. An expanded Centennial Park, nearly doubled in size, with a boardwalk, trails, open lawns, a new ice rink and basketball courts. A new transient marina for tourists, complete with a new landmark donated by the Rotary Club, a Victorian clock. 2017 saw significant progress on the redevelopment of Memorial Square including the relocation of the Cenotaph to a more prominent location in Meridian Place. And on the south shore, Military Heritage Park pays homage to Canada's military history and contributions to peace, with gardens and landscapes that evoke the battlefields on which Canadians served. This was the City's legacy project for Canada 150; it was only possible because of the vision of those who created Barrie's beautiful waterfront in the first place. It's a democratic place – anyone and everyone is welcome – that it belongs to the people.

In addition to these high profile changes, it's the changes in our community that aren't as visible are perhaps the most significant. The census data released this year told us Barrie is becoming more diverse, with a wider range of jobs, a broader mix of housing types, and yes, a wider range in incomes that will mean we need to do more to support the least fortunate in our community. These are the long term trends that will shape our city in the years to come, and the ones that bring both the greatest challenges and opportunities for the future.

I wish everyone the very best for a safe and healthy 2018.