

REMARKS FOR MAYOR RICHARD M. DALEY
(as prepared for delivery)
CREDIT VALLEY CONSERVATION AUTHORITY
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Thank you very much for inviting me to participate in your conference.

I appreciate the common vision that the people in this room share with regard to the importance of conservation. It's a privilege to be able to speak today about some of my experiences in Chicago.

When I was elected mayor in 1989, people described Chicago in a lot of ways: "green city" was not one of them. Our whole country was less environmentally conscious then. And people certainly didn't look to cities to lead the way on issues related to conservation and the environment.

Two things have changed since then. First, the Blackhawks finally won a Stanley Cup. We weren't sure that was ever going to happen again.

And second, Chicago has shown the country and the world that cities can play a crucial role in what I describe as sustainable development. That means striking a comfortable balance between a strong economy and a healthy respect for the importance of our natural resources.

Today, I'd like to speak about two things. First, I'd like to explain the important roles that cities must play as we develop a greener lifestyle.

And second, I will walk you through the politics and implementation of some of the major environmental policies that we implemented during my time as mayor. One of the points I want to emphasize is that most of these policies required collaboration with groups far beyond the City Council. We had to collaborate with the business community, with the suburbs, with Congress, and even with our counterparts in Canadian cities on the Great Lakes.

I will describe an example of each of those policies, and during the Q and A I would be happy to speak about others.

But let me start with a question. How many of you know what part of the U.S. has the smallest per capita carbon footprint? What is the most

energy efficient, conservation-oriented place in America?

The answer is Manhattan, in New York City. For most people, that's counterintuitive—though maybe not for this group. The environmental benefit of cities comes from density. In cities, more people can walk and bike to work, or take public transit. The commutes are shorter. The apartments and homes share common walls, so they are cheaper to heat.

The density of places like New York or Chicago or Toronto makes it easier to protect valuable open space outside of our cities. As we look ahead 10 or 20 or 50 years, we must recognize that cities will play an important role in building a greener society. This will be particularly true as we get more serious about addressing CO₂ emissions and climate change.

But cities have to be places where people want to live. Being green is an important part of that.

We recognized two things in Chicago. First, our environment is an asset. When I say that, I mean that it is literally an asset in the sense that it will provide future wealth. Like any asset, we shouldn't destroy it.

If there is no healthy Lake Michigan, there is no prosperous Chicago. It's that simple. You don't have to be an environmentalist to understand that.

Obviously that's not always how we thought. For a hundred years we assumed that a resource like the Great Lakes could never get used up. We assumed that it would be there forever, serving all of our needs. Now we understand that that is simply not true.

Second, we realized that quality of life matters if we are going to attract the most highly-educated and talented people to our cities. Cities used to be places that brought together coal and iron ore and lots of cheap labor. Workers lived in cities because they had to. That's where the factories had to be, so that's where the jobs were.

Successful 21st Century cities are entirely different. Successful cities are cauldrons that bring together people, ideas, information, goods, and culture to create wealth and opportunity.

Because of that, successful cities must provide a quality of life that is attractive to the most highly-productive and best-educated workers,

who can increasingly choose to live anywhere, from Chicago to Mumbai.

That message is just as important to the business community as it is for the environmental community. Every successful city must strike a balance between economic opportunity and sustainable environmental practices.

That was our vision in Chicago. What I'd like to describe now is how we implemented that vision—by collaborating with the business community, and by working at every level of government: local, regional, state, federal, and even international. The reality is that most of our environmental challenges don't recognize political boundaries. So our solutions cannot be constrained by those boundaries either.

To begin with, we led by example. We were the first city in the U.S. to install a rooftop garden on City Hall. We showed the City how green roofs can collect rain water, reduce summer temperatures, and save energy. There are now more than 600 rooftop gardens and green roofs on public and private buildings in the City, covering over seven million square feet.

The public sector showed that green roofs make sense. The private sector followed our lead. Chicago also now requires that all developers who receive economic assistance from the City put green roofs on their buildings.

Next, we worked with the City Council to begin changing policies at the local level. Our Administration created the first Department of the Environment, making us the first city in the U.S. to have a stand alone department dedicated to improving the national environment.

We did a lot of things to make Chicago greener in 22 years. Don't worry, I'm not going to list them here, but I will give you examples. We planted 600,000 new trees. Not only does that make the City look better, but those trees remove 25,000 tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere every year.

We added parks and open space—1,500 acres of new open space and almost 100 new parks.

Meanwhile, we paid attention to the kinds of buildings that we were adding to our city. I worked with the City Council to promote green development by changing our zoning laws and the building code. We adopted a new fast-track permitting process for green buildings. Any developer who agrees to build a LEED certified building can get a building permit in just 30 days.

These are the kinds of things that we could do at the City level. We had the resources and we had the authority. They were within our control. But that wasn't always the case. One of my proudest accomplishments is the creation of Millennium Park, which is now one of Chicago's proudest cultural amenities.

Millennium Park was created in partnership with the private sector. The City provided the land and the vision. Business and civic leaders helped to raise the money to build one of the great urban parks in America. There is no way government could have done that alone.

Another thing we realized in Chicago is that we are part of a region. Chicago has over 270 suburbs. Our economies are linked together. Obviously the quality of our environment is linked together as well. Many of our most important environmental issues have to be addressed regionally—issues like air quality, and public transportation, and storm water management, and protection of open space.

When I took over as mayor, there was no regional forum where mayors could meet to deal with our shared regional challenges. I organized the Metropolitan Mayors' Caucus for the Chicago area—a partnership that now serves as a model for other regions. Now it is possible for 273 mayors to discuss and act on our shared economic and environmental challenges.

We recognized—not just in Chicago, but in each of the participating suburbs—that we are far better off acting regionally on many issues than we are trying to act alone.

Of course, many of our environmental challenges required state or federal help. Yes, we could plant trees and create parks in Chicago. But we could not protect the Great Lakes. For that reason, Chicago was a strong supporter of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact. We realized that our extraordinary water resources in the Midwest should not be squandered.

On the U.S. side, the Great Lakes Compact required ratification by each of the eight states bordering the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River. The Compact was also ratified by Congress and signed by President George W. Bush. What that means is that we now have clear policies on how we manage this remarkable fresh water resource.

Obviously we share the Great Lakes with our Canadian neighbors. And that is where I will finish. Our green vision in Chicago also required international cooperation. In 2003, I organized a coalition of mayors from the U.S. and Canada to form the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative.

The Initiative grew to 71 mayors, which meant that we were able to work collaboratively across international borders on issues ranging from water management to invasive species.

I know that you share my views on the importance of sustainable development. But the vision isn't enough. The point I hope I've left you with is that implementing that vision requires action on every front.

Our green journey in Chicago started with City Hall. We literally went up to the roof of own building and built a garden.

But that green journey also involved the business community, our civic leadership, the broader Chicago region, Illinois and other Midwest states, the U.S. Congress, and our Canadian neighbors.

You are familiar with the old environmental aphorism: “Think globally, act locally”.

That’s not quite right. I’m here today to tell you something slightly different: “Think globally, act locally, regionally, federally, and internationally”.

Thank you very much.

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