

## **Mayor's Blog - January 2016**

### **January 4**

I don't often make New Year's resolutions but promised myself late last year that I would do my best to pick up my blog after almost a year of neglect. I know most of you realize why I let it go but so many have encouraged me to start again. January always means the beginning of budget deliberations. I would really like to see input from residents. Please check with the Office as to the dates for budget meetings and try to attend. You will be heard. If you are unable to attend written comments would be much appreciated. With so many costs increasing and grants decreasing we are faced with decisions of either cutting services or increasing taxes. People often comment that they will not be upset if taxes increase by 2 or 3% in order to get their project underway. This would be fine if we did not have several groups thinking the same thing so each 2% increase quickly adds up to a much more significant increase. Do give this some thought as we need to hear from you.

The month started with two very special social events. On Sunday I attended a worship service at St. John's Anglican Church in Thamesford honouring Norm Lansdell on his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. I thought it was a wonderful tribute that his church family planned the event. I was unable to stay for the reception following. I go to so many events but seldom have time to stay for the cake - probably a good thing for me!

Today, January 4, I attended a breakfast at the former Oxford Mutual building on the west side of Thamesford. Following a delicious meal we went outside for the unveiling of their new sign signifying their merger with North Waterloo Insurance Company to form the new Heartland Farm Mutual Insurance Company. Oxford Mutual has been a longstanding business in Zorra and I think this step signifies their continuing success in our community. I was pleased to extend congratulations to them and to thank them for the positive influence they have been for life in Zorra.

### **January 5**

I had a very interesting conversation with a gentleman in Harrington who has some very innovative ideas for slowing down the traffic there and in other areas of the Township. I really think he is on to something as he wants to work with the owners and companies involved. I know that any time I have contacted them about resident complaints they were very interested and concerned and promised to deal with the offending drivers. Vehicles travelling at excessive speeds especially in built up areas cause a very negative reaction towards the company they represent. There will be a presentation at Zorra Council next Tuesday morning at 11:20. This should be of interest to many citizens so I encourage you to attend.

### **January 6**

I attended the County of Oxford Towards Zero Waste Committee meeting. They are dealing with ways to eliminate most, if not all of the waste, going to our landfill as part of the County Sustainability plan for the future. They will be participating in the Oxford Expo Sustainability event being held January 28 at the Woodstock Auditorium 9:30 to 7. At present they have nearly 30 exhibitors and are hoping for a dozen more as well as several excellent speakers. You can come and go or stay for the whole day. The committee is planning to make every effort to make it a Zero Waste event. There will be many opportunities to learn about Waste

Management as well as the Sustainability issues. I believe it will be an event well worth attending.

While on the topic I want to remind you to keep checking your Waste Management calendar and/or calling the department to learn more about the materials now accepted for recycling. If you are removing all the materials you can you should be noticing a huge drop in the amount of garbage you send. People with several bags each week simply are not interested in recycling - or perhaps are independently wealthy and don't mind paying for several unnecessary tags each week.

That evening I attended a meeting regarding the future of the Victoria Day weekend events in Thamesford. It was encouraging to see over a dozen people attending and some came forward to take on executive positions. It seems there are jobs for many people but none of them appear to be too difficult or time consuming. Please watch for information regarding future meetings and give what time you can. If your organization has sponsored an event in the past let them know of your plans for this year and save them the time of having to contact you for the information. So many people enjoy this part of Thamesford life so surely a few more can help make it happen.

### **January 12**

I think today was one of the most interesting Council meetings I have ever attended. We had a presentation by Katie Neil and Rebecca Wallace from Oxford County Public Health entitled "Healthier Food Environments in Public Recreation". As some of you may be aware Zorra Council and Staff are trying to introduce some healthier choices into the menu offered at our arena food booths. We are not completely eliminating other popular items but are adding some that are more nutritious so people conscious of food choices are now being given a choice. This issue came up during our Council meeting at the Thamesford School. The students were dismayed to hear that some of the candy and snack items would be replaced with a new selection. However after some explanation and listing of the newer items about half of the students indicated they were in favour of the changes. The ladies from Public Health attended to support these changes and to give us ideas for developing this initiative. I would be interested in your comments.

Mr. Houston, who lives in Harrington, spoke about a programme he calls "Take Back Your Town" regarding possible solutions to the speeding problems in Zorra. I believe his proposal has merit and a committee was formed to present the information to our Policing Committee. Your cooperation will be needed for this idea to be carried out. I suggest you try to attend the next Policing meeting to hear the idea for yourself. It has been very frustrating over the years to be aware of the dangerous manner in which many drive through our built up areas - and yet feel almost helpless about dealing with the concern.

Plans are being made for an Official Opening of our new Fire Station in Thamesford. Watch for the announcement and plan to attend. The building has been constructed so it will also serve as our Emergency Measures Command Centre as well.

Doug Mills presented the Recreation Department report. The swimming pool in Thamesford is in need of extensive repairs. A full report of options and costs is to be available for budget

deliberations. This will begin February 2 at 9:30 a.m. and everyone is welcome to attend and your suggestions will be invited.

The Strategic Plan has been finalized and has now been adopted by Council. This will be a “living document” and will likely see changes as we progress through the next four years but it will be a very public presentation of what we hope to accomplish and a record of “how we did”. Check it out on the website or phone the Office for a printed copy and share your thoughts with us. It is our plan for Zorra and your input is now very necessary.

### **January 21**

I attended a day long board meeting for ERTH Corporation. After long discussions the 2016 budget was finally passed. Senior Management worked hard to accommodate Board request for cuts so we ended up with much more acceptable figures. This is still a huge learning project for me as I have no experience in the electrical supply industry. Many thanks to all who assist me in understanding business practices.

That evening I attended the OFA Annual meeting. After a meal featuring delicious local products, a representative of the Oxford Junior Farmers reviewed recent activities. This group of young people have yearly raised an enormous amount of money - all of which is donated to the local community. Great work! Following this a short business meeting included the election of Executive and Board Members. I am hoping to find a way to at least receive meeting minutes from our Oxford Federation group as I want to know of the projects they are tackling and assist where I can.

### **January 25**

ZRAC met at the Embro Community Centre for their regular monthly meeting. A delegation from the Zorra Skating Club requested an extension of the Embro ice season until April 28<sup>th</sup>. This is an opportunity for other groups to book some extra ice time and individuals and other groups might also consider renting ice for private parties. The Skate Park and Splash pad committee continues to meet and progress was reported. Congratulations to the people in the Harrington area who have successfully constructed an outdoor rink. You have to experience this activity to understand the work demanded but they stepped up to the task and the ice pad is now useable. Many thanks to all who helped. Take a drive up and experience a real Canadian tradition. Difficulty in hiring enough lifeguards for our pool in Thamesford was also a topic. The Board is suggesting a financial incentive to guards who take the training necessary and who fulfill their work contract each season. We learned that the pool really needs major repairs and upgrades. Decisions about the future of the pool will have to be made during budget deliberations.

### **January 26**

I drove to the UTRCA Administration building for a meeting with Ian Wilcox and other staff members to discuss issues regarding the proposed landfill. The talks were very helpful and their explanations about certain proposals by other groups were informative.

In the evening I attended a Public Meeting regarding improvements to Road 16 just east of Kintore. The meeting was well attended and Public Works Staff from the County answered

many questions and concerns and promised follow up to many other issues raised by residents. This will likely be a multi-year project starting in 2017.

### **January 27**

County Council heard from two particularly interesting delegations. Chris Friesan introduced Miranda Fuller who has just been hired as Director of the Future Oxford Partnership. She comes with an excellent resume and I think will do a great job in this position.

Kenneth Weston spoke to us once again about the importance of saving VIA Rail passenger service. Many people choose this method of travel because of the concerns of driving in heavy traffic e.g. to Toronto but also are beginning to consider environmental advantages. Certainly there are many things that appear to make it a much more sensible choice over the proposed high speed trains which to me, considering the cost and the infrastructure needed, will likely not be feasible in the immediate future.

The next day I attended the Sustainability Expo in Woodstock. It is very difficult to explain all that was there to someone who had not attended. The speakers were the highlight for me and I was sorry I had to leave before hearing the final presentation. We need to recognize the work done by so many to make this event possible. Oxford is leading the way across Canada and we should take advantage of all the information coming to our County. I don't know if this will be repeated another year or if the committee will tackle another type of event but I certainly hope for another opportunity to learn as much as I learned this year. Well done!

### **January 30**

The Embro Skating Club held their annual Dinner and Auction. It was a wonderful opportunity for people to support an organization that does such good work with many of the young people in our community.

The Township Office has a supply of "Caution Go Slowly" signs produced by OFA. Many people use them to remind drivers to slow down because of children and seniors who may be on or near the laneways. These signs are free so please pick one up. When they are gone I can get more.