

Mayor's Blog - April 2016

April 2

I was invited to participate in the Literacy event at the Embro Library so along with others from the community read to the children present. There was a full hour of activities for the children and parents present and after a snack each child was allowed to select a new book free of charge. A great morning for everyone who attended.

Do plan to attend the Public Meeting at the EZCC April 28 at 7 p.m. regarding the idea of moving the Embro Library to the Community Centre. People are getting excited about this and ideas are coming forward regarding how best to do it.

April 5

Zorra Council spent the morning part of the meeting dealing with Staff reports. Chief McFarlan had a great deal of information to bring to Council's attention including the final financial report from the new Fire Hall. The overrun was approximately \$40,000 or 1.93% which I do not think is too concerning on a \$2 million building. I believe we have a very well built, functional building that will serve Zorra well for many years to come and I do not see any extravagances in construction or furnishing. Treasurer Maureen Simmons presented a 1st Quarter 2016 budget to actual summary which was most helpful. Check the website for this information. The Bylaw Enforcement Officer's report made mention of residents requests to be able to raise chickens within residential areas. This will be investigated with a report coming to Council for the next meeting. As I look at regulations in other areas it would seem the first regulation usually limits the number to 3 or 4 birds - but no roosters.

Free "Go Slowly" signs are still available at the Township Office.

The Director of Public Works gave an in depth report regarding measures that work and do not work for traffic calming. Council has asked that this information be printed in an up-coming Zorra News (next edition has already gone to print) but I am sure you could get a copy of the information from the Office.

A report regarding the Water and Wheels committee in Thamesford was discussed and a plan formulated to move ahead with preliminary investigation. It seems that much of the planning at Council always appears at first to be very slow and deliberate but once a formal plan can be formed and approved things then can move along much more quickly.

That evening I went to the Columbo Club in Beachville to hear a speaker regarding new technology for treating garbage other than putting it into the ground. It was particularly helpful and informative and I hope to be able to access more information regarding current science in this field. I believe garbage is a fact of life at least during the present time and will have to be dealt with but I am very much interested in the newer ideas. Many people now look at garbage as a resource and recovering the energy contained can become a profitable business. We say we are against the establishment of a landfill in Zorra - and yet our garbage is eventually landfilled. We have to do better ourselves. Every time I hear comments about the future life span of our Salford facility I hope the idea of replacing it with another pit never happens. New technology is even able to use materials mined from old landfill which in itself is encouraging.

April 13

County Council meeting. There was an interesting presentation regarding transportation issues in Oxford and really all of Southwestern Ontario. Many people without personal cars or trucks find the services provided by trains, buses etc. to be very inconvenient and costly. There is a real need for great improvement for them and for those with private transportation but who wish for many reasons to use a public system. High speed rail was one topic mentioned. I am told it will not likely come in the next 25 years mostly due to the cost - which will only increase as time goes on - but now is the time to start making plans for it. It was interesting the focus of all of this being on urban service. I think much more has to be done to inform rural residents of some of the things that will occur.

Some of the maps I have seen show the rails cutting across farmland simply for shortest distance. Farms in the path will be sliced without any consideration of farming practices. Because of the speed of the proposed trains - up to 200 km. per hour - crossings will not be possible as they are at present. They will have to be underpasses or bridges. Because of cost they will be spaced out quite significantly with present roads becoming dead ends. It would seem to me that this is another example of improvements being made for urban residents on the backs of the rural community. There will not be the stops as there are now. If you were going to Toronto from this area instead of catching a train in Stratford or St. Marys you would have to go to London or Kitchener. There will be many other considerations but thought this might interest you.

Discussions continue re Waste Management. There was a request for consideration of more salvaging of materials put out for the large item collection. Certainly "pickers" are welcome and I encourage you to put out the articles you have for the collection in Zorra starting May 9 well ahead of time so people who can make use of articles will have an opportunity to salvage what they can. For me the bigger problem is the amount of small garbage that is put out when it belongs in the bags put out for weekly collection. People are simply trying to avoid paying for bag tags but they are really cheating other taxpayers and losses have to be collected by taxation.

I encourage you to go to Embro Community Centre April 23 for what is really a huge swap meet. You can take and leave any useable articles you no longer need and you can take home anything you see that is there - free for the taking. Check the papers, website etc. for a complete list of articles accepted. At the same time the Thamesford Lions are collecting at both arenas used electronics and metals. It isn't listed but they regularly have bottle collections so if you have some you can donate I expect they will have room for them as well.

The same evening after enjoying dinner at the Pork BBQ prepared by the United Church in Embro I drove to Thamesford to attend the TBA meeting. Good news!! The Farmers' Market seems to be a go again this year - June through to the end of August. There are plans to expand the goods offered to more than just local foods. I think there will be something of interest for everyone. Plans are to use a different location so watch for further news.

Marie Keasey and I left this meeting a bit early and drove to the new Thamesford Fire Hall. The department there was hosting the Mutual Aid meeting. The speaker was particularly interesting talking about Animal Biosecurity. There were many references to the recent Avian Flu problem and the guest was very complimentary on the way our local emergency responders handles a very difficult and challenging situation.

April 18

Oxford County Library Board met at the Thamesford Library for their regular monthly meeting. Plans were made for the Public Meeting to be held at the Embro Community Centre Thursday April 28 at 7 p.m. to discuss the proposal to move the village library to the Community Centre.

April 19

The JMCC met at the Zorra Township Office to hear an outline of plans so far to begin the EA process regarding the proposed landfill project. It seems that very little progress has been made and most plans as related by representatives from Walker seem to be very tentative.

Zorra Council met that night. We had an information session with Jennifer Lajoie with the Municipal Property Assessment Office who had information regarding upcoming changes and improvement to residential assessment. You are strongly urged to watch for your notice which should be in the mail very soon if you have not already received it. Please read it carefully and if you have questions I suggest you contact Kelly Hall at the Zorra Office for clarification. Rural property notices will be delivered later this year. We will have another session with Ms. Lajoie at that time.

Once again we are looking for nominations for Senior of the Year. I think names need to be into the Office this week so your suggestions would be very welcome.

NEWS FLASH I just got off the phone with Doug Turvey. He is offering to produce the former McKay's (Matheson's) Flyer for the Embro area. Costs run about \$170 per issue. I am going to bring this to Council next week but in the meantime am wondering if there are individuals, businesses or organizations willing to sponsor a month - or perhaps work with another group for a joint sponsorship. I am sure recognition of this can be given. I need to hear from you.

April 21

ERTH Corporation Board meeting. Lots of work and lots of issues.

April 23

I hope you didn't miss Trashapalooza at the ECC. It was a big event with lots of great "stuff" available for free with most of what was left donated to organizations. I understand the Lions had a great day as well and I will be looking forward to hearing some of the results. Well done.

April 28

Oxford County Library Board held a Public Meeting at EZCC to discuss a proposal for moving the library to a new location. Circulation and attendance numbers at the Embro Library are dropping. Over the winter a "mini" library moved to the Community Centre during some of the hockey nights with a very positive response. It was our thought that moving the library completely there might help with the statistics. However it is very evident that the people who attended do not want any changes made. We will do our best to keep the Library in its present location for as long as we can. It is difficult for us to justify costs to County Council for so few users.

Just a few statistics: April material circulation down from 479 last April to 339 this year. Total for the 4 months 1450, down from 1721. Attendance was 752 last year January to April but only 470 for the same time period this year. Wireless usage is up but that can be accessed from outside.