

Mayor's Blog – February 20, 2020

February 20th and I'm still not sure if winter has begun? Is it over?

On January 20th I received a letter from Walker Environmental informing us that their draft Environmental Assessment "will be available in the coming weeks" for review. At the time I'm writing this it has still not been published. Three reminders of how this process works:

1. The Ministry of the Environment regulates the Environmental Assessment process, and will be the ultimate decision making authority.
2. As with any development it is proponent driven, meaning it is the responsibility of the proponent (in this case Walker, as the company that wants to start the landfill), to address the issues in the Environmental Assessment.
3. There is opportunity for public input. There will be several points at which you can have your say. Please watch for them at: walkerea.com

If you want a good summary of where the process is at, your Joint Municipal Coordinating Committee has prepared a summary viewable at oxfordreviewteam.ca #haveyoursay #doyourpart

At the February 5th Zorra Council meeting Council approved a plan of subdivision for the west side of Banner Road in Thamesford. The area is already inside the village limits and was previously zoned "development". It has now been zoned "residential" for 199 homes and a small park. There are challenges with growth, but there's also opportunity. Thamesford has reached a size where there are a lot of services being asked for by residents such as daycare, but the village isn't quite big enough to support those in an economically viable way for business owners. The hope is that the village will grow enough to make those services viable, but stay within the village borders. This is definitely not part of a plan to grow Thamesford indefinitely. We have a strong agricultural heritage in Zorra and we don't want to continue the sprawl and swallow up farmland. There is a desire for growth and services in Thamesford, but not a desire to grow beyond its current borders.

At the February 12th Oxford County Council meeting Staff presented a housing plan titled "100% Housed". The plan is intended to address the double problem of insufficient housing supply, and housing un-affordability, not just low-income and social housing. The plan has many action items to exploit not only existing municipal funds for more low-income and social housing; but also municipal policy change, which is hopefully going to result in partnerships with others to help address housing needs. Some of the policy changes proposed would make it easier for residents to have more flexible housing situations such as rentals or tiny homes. Many of the proposed solutions will require both changes to the Oxford County Official Plan and Zorra Zoning By-laws. I am confident that it is significantly better than what we have in place today. Council discussed and proposed amended motions, eventually settling on asking Council to approve the plan in principle and have it circulated to area municipalities for feedback.

The Minister of Environment Conservation and Parks Jeff Yurek hosted a Stakeholder Engagement Consultation on Conservation Authorities in London on February 14. I was invited to represent Zorra at this broad consultation with CAs, municipalities, developers, builders, OFA, and NGOs on how conservation authorities can function better. The presentations were excellent, each advocating for different versions of change based on their perspective.

The final reports on Council remuneration for both Zorra and Oxford Councils have now been received. The total paid by Zorra residents for me to be their Mayor in 2019 was \$32,416.78. The total paid by Oxford residents for me to represent Zorra residents at Oxford County Council in 2019 was \$29,552.00. Full reports for all Council members are available in the January 15 Zorra Council Agenda, and the February 12 Oxford Council Agenda. It's a bit weird to tell you what I get paid, but all Zorra, and Oxford County in the case of County Council, residents are essentially my boss, so I thought you should know.

I met with the Oxford OPP Detachment Commander to review several concerns I've heard from residents about reporting issues. The concerns were:

"I left a voicemail, but didn't get a call back" - If you are phoning the numbers below as appropriate this should not be an issue, do not call the detachment office to report incidents.

"I called to report an incident, but was told to use website" - they only intend to inform you of, and offer, the website. You are absolutely free, and encouraged, to phone the numbers below as appropriate.

"I called to report an incident, and was told not to call if it was under \$5000" - If this was communicated it was in error, the OPP still want you to report ANY incident.

If you have an incident, please report it through these methods:

1-888-310-1122

*OPP

*677

www.opp.ca/reporting

Or anonymously:

1.800.222.8477 (TIPS)

www.oxfordcrimestoppers.com

Emergency only: *911

On February 19 Zorra passed the 2020 operational and capital budget. The Township tax levy requirement is \$8,721,928.50 or a 5.62% increase over 2019, and apportioned as follows:

- Operating expenditures \$5,915,378.50
- Capital expenditures \$2,806,550.00.

This is a good budget that delivers based on a 1.9% inflation/CPI plus extra expenses to deliver improved services that Council has heard demand for from residents. Specifically some of those priorities for improvement are:

- \$175,000 for SWIFT to get more high speed internet to more residents.
- \$350,000 transportation increase totalling \$3,000,000 on bridges, culverts, and road reconstruction, changes to gravel maintenance to improve gravel road quality (more dust suppressant, less gravel), more robust paved road plan to preventively maintain those roads.
- \$97,100 increase in recreation staffing to address outstanding facility issues, and improve user experiences.

- \$331,000 in recreation facilities upgrades including trails and other Recreation Arts and Culture Master Plan items and the Embro Town Hall roof.
- And a \$34,032 Policing cost increase.

The final impact on tax rates will be calculated when Oxford County council adopts the tax ratios and the Province of Ontario establishes the 2020 Education tax rates.

As always, please feel free to contact me on any issue:

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