

Mayor's Blog – February 19, 2021

As I write this there are 2 active COVID-19 cases in Zorra, 45 in Oxford, and 61 in Southwestern Public Health as a whole, and our area is in Red. Please continue to #DoYourPart to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, to keep your community healthy, and businesses and services open:

- Stay home if you are sick
- Practice physical distancing by staying at least 2 metres apart
- Wear a face covering
- Wash your hands

Long time Zorra resident Tony Kelly passed away in February. Tony was a great guy. Community minded to a fault, involved with the Trojans, Calithumpian, getting Thamesford a pool, on Council for more than a decade, and so many other things. He did more than his part for his community, and he will be missed. There was a moment of silence in his honour at the February 17 Council meeting.

At the Top Aggregate Producing Municipalities of Ontario (TAPMO, Zorra is sixth in all of Ontario) meeting in January we discussed ways to effectively address the low rate of property taxes paid by pits and quarries. As a result, TAPMO asked member municipalities to fund an additional \$2,100.00 to TAPMO for lobbying efforts with the Province. I have been working with Mayor Seeley of Puslinch for several months on this approach to try to make the province understand the inequity in the property taxes gravel pits pay compared to other properties. Every dollar not paid by those properties is paid by other properties. In Zorra, this could be more than a million dollars per year. Zorra Council voted to fund the lobbying efforts.

At the January Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) (virtual) conference as Mayor of Zorra and Vice Chair of Community Schools Alliance (CSA) I lead the delegation to the Ministry of Education, and participated in the CSA delegation to the Liberals and NDP, emphasizing the value of our small rural schools, and advocating for policy change to support them.

I presented the Oxford County delegation to the Ministry of Environment Conservation and Parks advocating that they move forward with Full Producer Responsibility for recycling as it has the potential to promote innovation by producers to reduce packaging, increase recyclability of their products and establish viable end markets for recycled material.

Next, I presented the Oxford County delegation to the Ministry of Transportation advocating for an inter-regional transportation system for people and goods in place of the previous high speed rail proposal.

I also participated in the Oxford County delegation to the Ministry of Long-Term Care (LTC). The Oxford operated Long Term Care facilities (Woodingford Lodges) have had relatively minimal COVID impacts, but we need to learn and do better regardless. To that end we asked for sustainable funding for a registered staff member skilled in

Infection Prevention and Control training, and sustainable funding for a Resident Care Aide.

Next was the Oxford County delegation to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing asking for adequate and timely funding to support front line healthcare, and continued support for rural broadband expansion. We also spoke to the Ministry of Health asking that Oxford County Paramedic Services be funded to implement community paramedics which could be a complimentary expansion to existing 911 service delivery.

When the new Zorra Maintenance Facility (ZMF) is complete Public Works will no longer need the Embro shop location, so Zorra Council has begun it's consideration of what to do with the property. Council will be considering options for potential future uses of the property, and a key component of that will be public consultation. Council wants to hear from the greater Embro community, so we will be taking extra steps beyond what is required under the Planning Act and our own Public Engagement Policy for this project. You can reach Council in all the ways you have and continue to, but we will be reaching out additionally in the future for your input on this, please watch for it to get informed and give input.

Every year I post my "total remuneration", that is all money paid to me in my elected roles (salary, expenses, etc., there's no benefits or pension). For 2020 you paid me \$32,027.82 to be Mayor, and \$29,960.00 to be Oxford County Councillor, totalling \$61,987.82. Full details are available on respective Zorra and Oxford agendas.

Zorra Township Council has unanimously passed the 2021 budget as follows: 2021 Approved General Levy \$8,927,328.50 or a 2.35% increase over 2020. However, because of the growth in assessment (new builds) this will result in the "average residential property" paying the same property taxes as last year. That's 0% Zorra residential tax increase and 0% Oxford residential tax increase in 2021. Final impact on your property tax bill will not be known until decisions have been made by Oxford County council on tax ratios (March) and the Province of Ontario establishes the 2021 Education tax rates (set by the Provincial Government).

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

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