

March 21, 2024 Blog

The Township, in collaboration with Zorra Caledonian Society, Thistle Theatre, Embro Minor Soccer and Embro & Zorra Agricultural Society, have been planning and raising funds to bring a covered meeting space to the Embro-Zorra Community Centre. With funds generously donated from individual residents and several community organizations, the committee has raised a total of \$200,000 to support this project. The committee was approved for \$90,000 in funding from the Ontario Trillium Grant. And Zorra Township has committed 30% of the cost up to \$58,200. I'm happy to say that Council has given the formal go ahead to construct the pavilion within budget with the intention of it being available for use at this year's Embro Highland Games!

Both Zorra and Oxford Councils have now adopted changes to update our Development Charges (DCs). Oxford County and seven of the area municipalities partnered to do a joint Development Charges Background Study designed to conduct a mandatory ten-year review of existing development charge by-laws. The intent of development charges is to ensure that infrastructure costs arising from growth are funded by the growth that requires the additional services. DCs have been established to help fund these costs instead of existing residents and businesses through property taxes. The More Homes, Built Faster Act, 2022 (Bill 23) changed and reduced how municipalities can collect development charges resulting in further limiting the ability of the Township to collect DCs for growth-related infrastructure costs. This means more of the cost of growth is transferred to existing residents.

Ontario's municipal financial framework is failing residents, businesses and major industry. Municipal revenues do not grow with the economy or inflation. Property tax grows with assessment only, unlike sales and income tax that grows with the economy...and the Province collects. And yet municipalities subsidize the provincial treasury by almost \$4 billion a year for services like Housing, Mental Health, and addiction and all the social services that go with that. And the police, fire, and ambulance when those services fail.

Municipal Investment in Areas of Provincial Responsibility totals \$16B vs provincial grants of \$12B. Demand outpaces housing options for our most vulnerable residents. There are now nearly 1,400 encampments in municipalities across Ontario, including at least 20 in Oxford.

In the last five years, property taxpayers have seen a 200% increase in costs to support homelessness services in their communities. Municipal financial sustainability is urgent, province-wide, and central to Oxford's ability to solve the housing and affordability crisis.

Zorra and Oxford join the Association of Municipalities of Ontario in calling on the province to work with municipal governments on a new fiscal framework. A modern provincial-municipal fiscal partnership would help build a solid foundation for economic prosperity and better quality of life across Ontario. In all corners of the province, Ontario faces new

realities, including growth pressures, an affordability crisis and increasing homelessness. Municipalities can't address these challenges alone.

More details are available in AMO's Pre-Budget Submission:

<https://www.amo.on.ca/policy/finance-infrastructure-and-economy/social-economic-and-prosperity-review-amos-2024-pre>

Lastly, as I report every year that I have been on Council, the final reports on 2023 Council remuneration for both Zorra and Oxford have now been published.

The total paid by Zorra residents for me to be their Mayor was \$36,848.
The total paid by Oxford residents for me to be their Warden was \$106,145.

Full reports available in the March 20 Zorra Council Agenda, and the February 28 Oxford Council Agenda:

<https://pub-oxfordcounty.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=1bd9fa4c-afbf-4141-863e-1a56b82f09b6&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English>

<https://zorra.civicweb.net/document/40238/?splitscreen=true&attachmenturl=%2Fdocument%2F40069>

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

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