

Mayor's Blog – January 21, 2021

As I write this there are 11 active COVID-19 cases in Zorra, 195 in Oxford, and 292 in Southwestern Public Health as a whole, and the Province is again in a State of Emergency. 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 when you can't physically distance
- Wash your hands

People who should know better are making bad decisions about travel. Don't let it discourage you. People in important positions, making big decisions, earning a lot of money, are travelling and they shouldn't be. That's wrong. That doesn't mean we should all abandon the guidelines that are there to lower COVID risks. Just because they're not doing their part doesn't mean we shouldn't do ours. Unfortunately, it means we have to do their share as well. But that's because they're careless, and not thinking about their community. Be better than that.

On January 13 came the fantastic news that COVID vaccinations in Long Term Care started in Oxford County. This is a start to relieve the pressure on the people who work and live in those facilities.

Your Joint Municipal Coordinating Committee (JMCC) has published your Peer Review Team's (PRT) review of Walker's Environmental Assessment (EA) for their proposed landfill in Zorra. The PRT recommendation was clear that "...in almost every instance the PRT has found the technical support studies to be lacking in regard to these key requirements. Accordingly, it is our team's opinion that the draft EA fails to meet the requirements of the EA Act..." "Accordingly, we recommend that the JMCC reject the subject draft EA and urge the Minister to not approve it unless and until the deficiencies noted in this report are fully addressed in detail by the proponent and subject to a further review by key stakeholders." This is a proponent (Walker) driven process, so it is up to them whether and when they want to proceed with an application or not. I encourage everyone to read the PRT draft report on the proposed landfill Environmental Assessment: oxfordreviewteam.ca

At the last Zorra Council meeting of the year Council decided to award a contract to build a new Zorra Maintenance Facility south of Kintore to replace the two existing facilities. Making commitments is easy. Keeping them is hard. The commitments that Council made were:

"We are a prosperous community that provides opportunities to work and shop in our community and to grow in a sustainable manner",

"We are an environmentally conscious community, are good stewards of our natural environment and we protect our environment by valuing our natural assets and using our resources wisely", and

"Commit to 100% use of Renewable Energy by 2040".

Our commitments mean a lot to me. It is a matter of principle. Too often politicians make commitments and then don't do the hard work of meeting them. This Zorra Maintenance Facility decision was a test of Council's ability to meet those commitments to residents. I'm very proud of the decision Council made on this project. It has taken many years, more than one Council, and countless reports answering council's questions, and

analyzing all of the options, to arrive at this point. The existing buildings are long overdue for replacement and not suitable for housing or maintaining modern equipment needed to maintain our roads. Because of the way this project has been planned for and financed over the last ten years there will be NO IMPACT on 2021 property taxes for this building. Additionally, because of the choice of geothermal heating powered by solar panels through net metering, the building will cost less over its lifespan than a conventional natural gas building. Zorra residents will be protected against rising energy costs and carbon taxes. On top of all that, it uses 100% renewable energy and significantly reduces the Township's pollution and carbon footprint. Council did its part to meet ALL our commitments.

Since adopting development charges this term of Council the municipality has collected \$313,595.00 from new builds and development. That is \$313,595.00 that does not need to be collected from the general property tax levy. Growth paying for growth.

Oxford County Council has unanimously passed the 2021 budget as follows: 2021 Approved General Levy \$63,724,374 or a 1.4% increase over 2020. However, because of the growth in assessment (new builds) this will result in the "average residential property" valued at \$271,277 paying \$996 of the general levy, which is approximately \$6 less than last year.

Zorra Township Council has authorized Staff to finalize the 2021 Budget for public consideration BEFORE FINAL APPROVAL. The entire budget is available in the Agendas for you to review EXACTLY what Council reviews. The 2021 draft proposes a \$8,927,328.50 levy. This is a total increase of \$263,342.50 representing a 3.0% levy dollar increase from 2020 to 2021. Council previously received a report that showed the impact on taxation of net growth in assessment in the Township from 2020 to 2021 of \$205,400.00. This leaves \$57,942.50, and it is proposed that this be funded by reserves from the 2020 surplus. This would leave a net increase of \$0 to be funded through taxation meaning the 2021 Township tax rate for residential would be close to the same rate and the majority of property owners will pay the same taxes for Township purposes as they did in 2020. 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).

The next steps in the budget approval process are a February 3, 2021 9:00 a.m. Council Meeting for reconsideration of Operating and Capital Budget, then a February 17, 2021 6:00 p.m. Public Information Session, and adoption of the complete budget.

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As always, follow the advice of Southwestern Public Health: www.swpublichealth.ca

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