

November 21, 2021

As I write this on November 21st there are 2 active COVID-19 cases in Zorra, 80 in Oxford, and 165 in Southwestern Public Health as a whole.

The Township of Zorra has adopted a policy requiring that all members of Council, staff, and Committees be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. This policy is in place now, and will be fully in effect on January 1, 2022. At this time, 101 out of 102 (99%) of all staff and Council have been vaccinated, or will be fully vaccinated, by November 30, 2021, and will be 100% vaccinated by January.

On November 29th at 7pm in the Thamesford District Recreation Centre come out and tell the TVDSB Rural Education Task Force about the importance of rural schools in our communities! The system is broken. We have the illusion of local decision-making because of property taxes and locally-elected trustees. But the reality is those dollars go off to Toronto and the decisions about local schools are made by unelected bureaucrats. School capacity needs are driven by development, and development is regulated by municipalities. That's why municipalities are responsible for a community's library, parks and recreation, fire, and ambulance services. Communities should have the same say on schools: they are literally our communities' future.

As the Vice Chair of the Task Force, we need to ensure that the Board hears from families in our rural communities first-hand about how our school board can better support their unique needs. The task force is made up of trustees, municipal leaders, and community members. It was created two years ago to come up with ideas for the board's rural-education strategy. I have worked personally with Trustees Arlene Morell, Meghan Ruddock and Sean Hunt on this initiative and have every confidence they are advocating for this.

I expect housing to be a major issue for the foreseeable future. We have rapidly gone from "housing is expensive" to "housing is unaffordable" for many people. In Oxford County there are currently 2500 people on a waitlist for Affordable Housing, while 100 are housed. This does not mean that there are 2400 unhoused people in Oxford, but it does mean that there are 2400 people in housing that is unaffordable long term, or unsafe. Many of these people will end up unhoused. This is a complex problem that requires all levels of government, and the private sector, to address. In Zorra and Oxford we need to do more with zoning to not only allow, but encourage, and require smaller, higher density, and more variety in, housing. We need to make spaces in our settlement areas for taller buildings to address the housing crisis, and stop sprawl into our farm fields.

Oxford County is continuing the process of considering changes to land use policy in the "agricultural reserve". County Planning Staff will be making presentations to area municipal councils in the coming months including Zorra on December 15. Please watch the Township website for that agenda and presentation. None of this is finalized yet, please watch for opportunities for input over the coming months.

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

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