

January 20, 2022

Through the pandemic I have tried to give context to our community's situation by giving you the case counts in Zorra, Oxford, and Southwestern Public Health. Due to reduced testing capacity, the lack of complete reporting of test results, and the potentially reduced relevance of case count to hospitalization and ICU cases, I will not be reporting that.

Due to staff having tested COVID positive or isolating due to symptoms/exposure several County services are being managed daily to maintain service delivery. Woodingford Lodge Woodstock and Tillsonburg are in outbreak at time of writing, several Paramedic Staff are off, and Water and wastewater and public works (winter maintenance) staff are short. To date this is being managed successfully by staff. Senior management is actively working on a strategy which will help ensure that we can maintain our 911 requirements as well as ongoing testing and vaccination functions. Today the Province announced a re-opening plan that I will not detail here as it is not my plan and is (obviously) subject to change between when I write this and when you read it.

Last month I reported that the County budget had been passed but that I anticipated several County Councillors had changes they wanted to make. The County budget has now been finalized as follows:

- County general levy \$66,552,568 million – 4.4% increase (0.4% less than Ontario's 4.8% inflation rate, and again some of that will be offset by growth). In last month's column I reported 4%, that was my mistake.
- Housing budget increase of \$1.5 million – funded 50% from Reserves and 50% from the Landfill Reserve Fund
- Housing Strategy that will identify gaps across the housing continuum and action required to meet the County's immediate and future needs, an initiative that also leverages provincial funding to establish an additional 66 affordable units planned in 2022
- Woodingford Lodge additional personal care time to support the health and wellbeing of those needing long term care supports in order to attain the goal of four hours of care per resident per day by 2025 – investment of \$2 million in 2022 fully funded by the Province
- Community Paramedicine Program delivered by Paramedic Services to help reduce hallway healthcare; provide additional and appropriate care for seniors; and, delay the need for long-term care for our seniors – investment of \$2.4 million in 2022 fully funded by the Province based on need in our community.

Final impact on your property tax bill will not be known until Zorra finalizes its budget in the first quarter of 2022, and decisions have been made by Oxford County Council on tax ratios (March) and the Province of Ontario establishes the 2022 Education tax rates.

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

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