

Mayor's Blog – March 22, 2019

The snow has mostly melted (for now...), fields are draining, and soon roads will be graded. Soon enough we will be complaining about dusty roads and how hot it is.

The gravel roads are all (including mine...) in terrible condition now and will be for a while. They're still too frozen to be graded, but even when thawed they'll be too wet for a while. Public Works is watching for the first opportunity to get at them.

Also by the time you read this Council will have almost completed the 2019 Budget (it is a bit later due to a late start because of the municipal election). There were some welcome spending announcements from both the Federal and Provincial Governments that will help the long term budgeting. The Provincial Government announced \$581,087 in new money with "no strings attached", and the Federal Government unexpectedly doubled the Federal Gas Tax portion by an additional \$220,000.

Council took strong action in conjunction with Oxford County to improve rural access to high speed internet. A Motion passed by Council added a surcharge of 2% of the Zorra tax levy to the Zorra Budget to fund additional fibre optic installation through additional funding of the SWIFT program commonly known as SWIFT Plus. This money would then give Zorra access to a similar fund created by Oxford County. It won't get to everyone right away, but it will get there, and this is a good start.

Council is now starting work on the 2019-2022 action items for our Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan is the guiding policy document for Council and Staff for this term of Council. It sets priorities and a work plan that will guide service levels and infrastructure improvements, and inform future budgets (and therefore property tax rates). I encourage you to check the Township website to review the 2016-19 Strategic Plan, and watch the Agendas for opportunities to follow along as Council develops the Strategic Plan. And as always, I encourage you to talk to your Councillor or myself about it.

The Province's Regional Government Review is ongoing and I wish I could tell you more about it, but I have been given no more information. Both Zorra and Oxford Councils have been working hard to formulate a response and try to have a conversation with the Minister of Municipal Affairs about the review. Zorra has taken a position that we are interested in participating in the review to find better ways to deliver services, but are in favour of the current two tier structure. I am hopeful that soon Oxford County will have taken a similar position. A #madeinOxford solution will be best for Oxford.

The Township is still working on potential plans for the former Maple Leaf property in Thamesford. Council has not yet decided to proceed with the project, only to explore opportunities that would achieve the development that Zorra/Thamesford need without undue risk and without any net debt. So the Township would be looking to purchase the land and then re-sell it to a developer(s) who would be quoting to a Request for Proposal (RFP) issued by the Township. The developer who best satisfies that RFP would be awarded the deal (assuming they met ALL criteria). There was a well attended public meeting on February 20th to share the current situation with residents and hear their concerns and hopes for the project. Staff continues to work hard on this and I am cautiously optimistic that we may be able to proceed with something this year. Again, only if there is no net debt and no undue risk.

Thamesford Public School Leadership Team students made a delegation to Council asking for support for a “Day of Caring” on April 25th where students would be out doing things for their community to make other’s lives easier. An act of caring can be anything, it could be something as easy as reading to younger kids, visiting elders, or raking lawns. They asked if they could use the Township brand #doingourpart, and if the Township would help promote the day, and Council enthusiastically supported this. I also encouraged the students to challenge the other Zorra schools (A.J. Baker P.S. and Zorra Highland Park P.S.) and other community groups. Watch the Township website and social media for updates on this event. How can you #doyourpart on April 25th?

We continue to strive to make Zorra better by doing our part. Zorra is progressive, environmentally conscious, economically strong, and prosperous.

Check in on the website, follow the Township on Facebook or Twitter, phone or email Staff or Council: we want to hear from you.

Join us, and add to your community by doing your part!

Marcus Ryan
Mayor, Zorra Township