

Mayor's Blog – November 28, 2019

On January 15, 2019, the Provincial government announced a Regional Government Review of municipalities in Ontario. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Steve Clark announced on October 25, 2019, the results of the review. “Throughout this extensive review, the government heard that local communities should decide what is best for them in terms of governance, decision-making and service delivery,” Minister Clark’s press release said. “After careful consideration of the feedback we heard through the course of the review, our government stands firm in its commitment to partnering with municipalities without pursuing a top-down approach. Minister Clark insisted that there was no predetermined outcome, and there would be no one size fits all approach. Zorra is very pleased with the announcement on October 25, 2019. I can also reaffirm Zorra’s commitment to more efficient, and effective delivery of services we provide to our residents. When the Regional Review was announced, I said I was confident that the review could be constructive with positive outcomes if we are all informed and prepared to “do our part”. Minister Clark has kept his word and done his part, and Zorra is ready to do our part in the municipal transformation efforts to make sure we are delivering efficient, effective and modern services that best meet the unique needs of our residents.

The long awaited Thamesford redevelopment is now a “done deal”. This \$5,960,000 purchase of 121 acres for redevelopment will add approximately 178 single family dwellings, 203 townhomes, 75 condominium townhomes, 350 medium density apartment units, and 9 000 sq.m. of commercial space. As a result of this redevelopment there will be an increase in Zorra’s population of approximately 1,750 people over the next 20 years, and an estimated increase in property taxes of \$700 000 per year when complete. Final numbers after land transfer tax and legal fees are not known yet, but the Township will have a net profit on the deal that Council will have to decide how to handle, but this is a good problem to have. Staff executed this deal within very tight restrictions put on them by Council to minimize the Township’s risk and Staff delivered a deal better than we ever hoped for. We look forward to working with Kingwood and Hogg Construction to make this development all it can be for Zorra. This redevelopment will allow us to address some immediate housing supply and variety issues. This development is “brownfield” redevelopment keeping agricultural land in production, it is infill and densification to make the efficient use of our expensive municipal infrastructure like water and waste water, roads, etc. These new homes will be walkable to businesses, school, and recreation. There are people of all ages in Zorra looking for smaller, more affordable housing, so they can move out on their own or downsize and the lack of that housing forces some to leave our community. One of the largest constraints on our economy, our local businesses, right now is labour availability and this is made worse by a lack of housing supply, variety, and rentals in particular. We are hopeful that as this development progresses it will help unleash our economic potential. As the development proceeds, and the benefits are realized, it will hopefully allow us to address some other needs like allowing us to offer more recreation programming and attract new businesses and services to Zorra. The Thamesford redevelopment addresses all of our strategic goals: Zorra is vibrant, prosperous, engaged and environmentally conscious.

Zorra Council has reviewed, but not yet passed, the 2020 Capital Budget which will determine what equipment will be replaced, what major building repairs and upgrades will be done, and what road/bridge/culvert projects will be done. The next step will be to approve that and review the Operational Budget. There will be a Public Meeting at the end of the process, but ALL Council meetings are open to the public, so please follow along and participate in YOUR budget. All of the information that Council sees to build

the budget is available to you at zorra.ca. Likewise, Oxford County Council has begun reviewing a proposed draft budget for Capital and Operating costs. This year's budget will be difficult as provincial funding pressures hit hard particularly in ambulance, Public Health, conservation, and other areas.

On November 22nd I met with several other regional Mayors, MPPs, and the Parliamentary Assistant to the Premier as part of South-Central Region Economic Development. We were looking for ways to reduce barriers to economic growth and unlock economic potential in the region.

You may remember that in early 2017 the Thames Valley District School Board voted to close Springfield and New Sarum P.S. in Elgin County. I have been doing my part trying to help them as part of the larger fight to help rural schools open. On November 19 I made a delegation to the Board to try to convince them and on Tuesday November 26 the Board debated and decided to rescind the closure of both New Sarum and Springfield P.S.

On November 5th myself and Mayor Comiskey of Ingersoll met with Minister of Environment Jeff Yurek and other Mayors from around Ontario to support the right of host municipalities to have a say in whether or not they should host a landfill.

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!

As always you can contact me on any issues at:

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