



February 21, 2025 Blog

Last month I wrote about the re-development approved for the former Maple Leaf Foods (MLF) lands in Thamesford. The vision for this development was always to provide the services that would be needed, not only for the new redevelopment, but for the entire village as it will exist in the future. Specifically that this growth would enable the Ministry of Education and the Thames Valley District School Board to deliver a much-needed school for our community. Well it worked! After much joint advocacy the Ontario Ministry of Education approved \$23.5 million for a new public elementary school in Thamesford. The proposed 479-pupil school will include an 88-space licensed childcare facility and shared recreation spaces, including a Township-owned gymnasium and soccer field. Construction of the school will be able to commence in late 2025. The collaboration between the Township of Zorra and the Thames Valley District School Board began in the Fall of 2023, when both parties signed a Memorandum of Understanding to facilitate exploration of multi-service co-builds. I want to thank and congratulate the TVDSB, and in particular Chair Beth Mai and Oxford Trustees Dave Cripps and Leeanne Hopkins, for their tireless work and enthusiastic collaboration.

In 2023, Oxford County Council made housing the #1 priority in its Strategic Plan, a goal tied to community health, safety and well-being. In order to advance that we have been advocating hard with the provincial government.

In January I presented to the Ontario Ministry of Finance pre-budget consultation on the struggles being faced by Oxford County. Our challenges are not unique: like many other municipalities in Ontario, our population is growing at rates that we cannot sustain and with that growth comes additional challenges like lack of mental health and addictions support services, housing shortages, and increased healthcare needs. These complex challenges are further exacerbated by inadequate financial resources. Programs and services that are typically administered by other levels of government are underfunded, shifting the fiscal accountability to local municipalities. In 2024-2025, Oxford County is contributing 55% of the total funding for housing, while the province and federal contributions combined represent the other 45%. As the government closest to the people, municipalities are bridging the funding gap to provide much needed services in areas including housing and homelessness, long term care, paramedicine, and Community Safety and Well-Being plans. Until this funding imbalance is resolved, municipalities will continue to experience added financial pressures in order to support community needs and well-being.

Also in January I spoke to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing specifically asking him to work with us to address housing and homelessness and encampments by funding more of the needed work. Again, it worked!

Oxford County received \$700,000 to support the creation of four additional affordable housing units and for further community outreach and homelessness support. Funding we have never before received.

Additionally, a proposal by the Oxford Ontario Health Team was accepted as one of 18 new Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment Hubs, or HART Hubs, to help people overcome substance abuse, addiction and mental health challenges. Specialized support for individuals is an important step in reducing homelessness and addiction as a whole in our communities. The HART Hub will provide evidence-based, multifaceted programs and services that address locally identified needs and will provide the appropriate services along the HART Hub client's journey. The journey has four main components: Visit to the Hub, Safety, Support, and Stability & Recovery. We are one step closer to having this vital resource to serve Oxford County.

All these new developments are the outcome of the efforts of many people, including councillors, staff and partners. Thank you to all who played a part and helped show that by working together, we can do our part and grow stronger together.

With strong population growth and increased traffic across our communities, Oxford County is considering additional speed management and traffic calming measures in Embro, Kintore, and Uniondale. This is part of the ongoing cycle of measuring traffic, implementing calming, re-measuring effectiveness, and considering additional measures.

In Embro the improvements made in 2019 have been measured many times with the following results. The majority of vehicles entering Embro from the north showed reduced speeds up to 33 km/h, exiting the village in this area showed reduced speeds of 9 km/h with centreline delineators in place, but speeds remained high when they were not present. The majority of vehicles entering Embro from the south end showed reduced speeds of up to 28 km/h. Speed measured for vehicles leaving Embro from this area reduced by 12 km/h with centreline delineators in place, but speeds remained high without.

With these results, staff are recommending:

- Considering additional traffic calming features such as curb bump outs with centre island, subject to the results of a pilot project in Plattsville in 2025;
- Using Automated Speed Enforcement, which uses a camera and a speed measurement device to issue infractions, in the Community Safety Zone portion of this road as part of potential future County-wide program; and,
- Continuing to share post monitoring results and data with local Ontario Provincial Police.

In Kintore traffic calming improvements made in 2021 were measured in 2024, with the following results.

The majority of vehicles entering Kintore from the west end had reduced speeds by 14 km/h, while those leaving Kintore in this area showed no change. The majority of vehicles entering from the north end had reduced speeds by 7 km/h, while those exiting the village increased speed by as much as 6 km/h. In the south, vehicle speed increased by 3 km/h, while outgoing speed increased by as much as 14 km/h.

With these results, staff are recommending:

- Installing flexible centreline delineators on all village approaches;

- Installing speed feedback signs at the north, south and east approaches;
- Using Automated Speed Enforcement as part of potential future County-wide program in the Community Safety Zone on Oxford Road 16; and,
- Continuing to share post monitoring results and data with local Ontario Provincial Police.

In Uniondale (Oxford Road 28 and 119) the traffic calming improvements made in 2022 were measured several times with the following results.

The majority of vehicles entering Uniondale from the north showed reduced speed of up to 3 km/h, but a range of different results for those exiting the village from this area, mostly increases in speed. In the south, incoming vehicle speeds reduced up to 23 km/h, while outgoing speeds reduced up to 6 km/h. In the east, the majority of vehicles entering Uniondale increased speed up to 8 km/h, while those leaving the village increased speed up to 2 km/h.

With these results, staff are recommending:

- Installing flexible centreline delineators at the north, south and east approaches to Uniondale;
- Installing a speed feedback sign at east approach into the village; and,
- Continuing to share post monitoring results and data with local Ontario Provincial Police.

These road safety measures have already been reviewed by Zorra Council, and will be presented to County Council on March 12. Google "Update on speed management and traffic calming improvements in Zorra Township" for the full details. More traffic calming will be coming for Thamesford this year.

But all this still isn't enough. People don't drive safely in our communities. And cars allow them to. My car beeps at me if I don't put my seatbelt on, but doesn't make a sound as I approach a stop sign (which it knows is there). My car tells me the speed limit where I'm driving, but is silent if I go over it. Most cars will go almost 200km/h even though the highest speed limit in Ontario is 110km/h. The provincial and federal governments need to do better with the people and vehicles that are licensed for our roads. So at Zorra Council Deputy Mayor Katie Grigg and Councillor Crystal Finch brought forward a motion committing us to explore more effective policies and calling on other levels of government to do the same:

WHEREAS speeding, distracted driving, and impaired driving are among the leading causes of driving related collisions, injuries, and fatalities in Ontario; and,

WHEREAS municipalities are called upon to modify driver behaviour through expensive infrastructure and even more expensive policing; and,

WHEREAS infrastructure and policing are inherently limited in their effectiveness at reducing speed and distracted driving, and entirely ineffective at reducing impaired driving;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Zorra Township calls on the Provincial and Federal governments to do everything in their power to limit speeding, distracted driving,

and impaired driving, and thereby reduce collisions, injuries, and fatalities in our communities;

THAT the Township of Zorra specifically requests that the Government of Ontario take action to implement the rural road safety program that Good Roads has committed to lead, which will allow Ontario's rural municipalities to make the critical investments needed to reduce the number of people being killed and seriously injured on Ontario's rural roads; and

AND THAT Zorra Township Staff work with Oxford County and all Oxford municipalities on the feasibility of implementing a long term Vision Zero Policy and the Good Roads Rural Road Safety strategy across all of Oxford; and,

THAT a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Ontario Premier, Ontario Minister of Transportation, Ontario Minister of Infrastructure, Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Ontario Minister of Rural Affairs, Ontario Associate Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response, and Ontario Minister of Health, and Good Roads; and

FURTHER THAT this resolution be circulated to all Oxford police services boards, Safe and Well Oxford, Good Roads, and all municipalities in Ontario requesting their support.

Did you know 211 is a free and confidential service that easily connects people to the critical social and community supports they need? 211 is available by phone for those looking to speak to a friendly voice or by text, online search, email or chat for those looking for convenience or who feel the stigma of asking for help. This makes the service available to all people of Ontario regardless of their level of digital understanding or ability to access the internet. 211 Makes Accessing Public Services Easy For the People of Ontario – Connecting Ontarians to the programs and services they need when they need them.

There has never been a more important time to shop local. I'm currently working with both Zorra and Oxford Staff on ways to "buy Canadian". I will personally be making every effort to avoid purchasing American products, and will not be travelling to the US.

Let's get a flag on every pole, every porch, every antenna in Zorra and Oxford!

#buyCanadian #shoplocal #doingourpart #growingstrongertogether #canada  
#canadianflag #never51 #11thprovince #canadaisnotforsale

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

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