



WARDEN'S REMARKS
INAUGURAL SESSION – DECEMBER 03, 2020

Good Morning and Welcome

I would like to start today by taking a moment to thank my wife Cheryl and my family for their continued support, advice and guidance during my time as Warden of our County.

Likewise, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the residents, staff and council of my Township for their continued support as well.

Let me begin by expressing my sincere gratitude for the confidence that all of you on County Council have shown me as we move into the final two years of our council term.

You told me that stability, strong guidance, dedicated leadership and a full team effort is what we require as we battle our way through this pandemic. I absolutely commit to all of these principles and will work as hard as I can for

you, your communities, our residents and businesses and all those that we provide service to.

Let me also say directly to our CAO Jim Pine and his amazing 900+ staff team that you have my commitment as Warden, and I know I speak for all members of County Council, when I say that we are a team and a family that is in this endeavor together.

Our staff team has shown us what professionalism and commitment really means, especially over these past 9 months or so since COVID-19 landed on our doorsteps. At every turn, at each new challenge that COVID-19 presented, they have worked as hard as they possibly could to support our residents, clients, those who find themselves homeless, our businesses and our partners.

For all those efforts let me say, again, on behalf of County Council - thank you! Thank you for embracing our simple motto...helping when help is required. There is so much

more to do in the coming months, and we will need to continue to put a heavy burden on your shoulders. You are strong today and you will make us all stronger tomorrow.

COVID-19 has brought terrible hardships to our communities and to our families. Our lives have been upended and unfortunately for some in our County, many in our province and many more across the country - changed forever.

While we are hearing encouraging news about vaccines, we know this virus is not done with us yet. We cannot let our guard down. We must continue to do all that we can to protect ourselves, our families, neighbours, friends, and of course those that we serve as Hastings County.

I know you will all agree with me in recognizing the incredible and selfless efforts of our front-line workers. The women and men who each day go to work in Hastings and Centennial Manors, who don their paramedic

uniforms, who respond to requests for housing and human services, and all those other employees who support our front-line team members deserve our support.

Our job as County Councillors is to ensure, as best we can, that our team have the resources needed to adequately carry out their duties and tasks. We have shown our resolve to do just that in many ways over the past months and I can give two good examples. Together with our joint Long-Term Care Committee chaired by Councillor Paul Jenkins, this Council unanimously supported the hiring of an Assistant Director of Nursing responsible for Infection Control at Hastings Manor, before we received word from the Province that it would support that critical position. Since we made that decision last summer, the Committee and Council have put a similar position in place for Centennial Manor in Bancroft.

Likewise, we recognized, along with our Emergency Services Committee, that COVID-19 was going to put tremendous pressures on our paramedics. We also knew

that given the right resources, especially in terms of community paramedicine, that Chief Doug Socha and his team could provide essential services to our communities, support our hospitals and especially, lift up our operations at Hastings and Centennial Manors and other long-term care facilities across our region.

Early in the Spring, we gave the green light to the CAO and Chief Socha to dramatically ramp up our community paramedic capacity while we worked to get provincial funding support. That effort was successful, and we received provincial commitments to go from 24 hours per week to 530 hours, at an estimated cost of \$750,000. We knew it was the right thing to do and we knew that with the direct and strong support of our local MPPs, Todd Smith and Daryl Kramp, we had a strong chance to convince the province to fund the added capacity. They came through for us.

Getting the financial support was one thing. Using that investment to achieve maximum public benefit is another,

and on that front, we need to acknowledge the tremendous work that Chief Socha and his paramedic team have done for both Hastings and Prince Edward Counties.

Many won't know about the intense efforts of our Chief and his team in getting the COVID-19 Assessment Centres in Belleville, Quinte West and Bancroft up and running in the early days of this pandemic. But let me tell you that I saw it first-hand. Their commitment to working with Quinte Health Care and the Public Health Unit was in my view, instrumental.

As of December 1st, our paramedics working at the Assessment Centres, in the community, and at people's homes, have administered over 44,084 swabs. They continue to be on the frontlines as the pandemic continues to hit us hard.

So let me say, on all of our behalf, Chief, you and your team have made us all proud. You are keeping us safe,

and we will continue to ensure that you have the resources to do so going forward.

While we have been busy responding to daily issues since the pandemic hit, we have a responsibility to also plan ahead.

Our staff have been putting their minds to the coming year and identifying projects and priorities, some of which will need to work their way through our budget process, and some that we can begin to move forward on more immediately.

While Chief Socha and his dedicated team of paramedics and community paramedics continue to deal with the daunting challenges that COVID-19 keeps delivering, there are a number of things that we need to do for them over the next year.

County Council has endorsed the Emergency Services Joint Committee's recommendation to build a new

ambulance base somewhere in the central part of the County. This new facility needs to be strategically located and built to serve our needs there and in other parts of our service territory. Doug and our Facilities Director, Jim Duffin, are now actively looking for the optimal site, while working with our engineer Chris Morden, of Morden Engineering, to develop the design for the new base. I think all of us want to see this important project move to the construction phase this year, if possible.

We also recognize that we can't run our ambulance operations effectively if we don't have the right number and mix of paramedic staff. Chief Socha has developed a strategic plan that has been reviewed by the Joint Committee, and it contains a step-by-step plan on staffing. I fully expect that the Joint Committee will be reviewing those measures this year as part of our annual budget process. Our County and the Joint Committee have always understood the benefits of a strong and efficient paramedic service, and I look forward to recommendations that they may have for us this year.

Like our Paramedic Service, the efforts of our Long-term Care Director, Debbie Rollins and her teams at Hastings and Centennial Manors have been truly inspiring in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each one of us on Council know how courageous and how incredibly dedicated our long-term care staff have been over these past 9 months or so, as the virus threatened our residents.

We remember the three residents of Hastings Manor, whose lives the virus took. The loss that their families and loved ones faced and continue to deal with can never be forgotten.

The sense of loss and the stress it has caused hit our staff hard too. We cannot forget that either. We can, however, do everything in our power to support their ongoing efforts to care for our residents in both Homes. And, we have will.

In the 2020 budget, the Long-Term Care Joint Committee, supported by County Council, made significant new investments to support our efforts to move to 4 hours of direct care per resident, per day. As a result of those new monies we are at 3.02 hours per day at Hastings Manor and 3.17 hours per day at Centennial Manor. To get to a full 4 hours per day, per resident, we calculate it will cost a further \$2.8 million at Hastings Manor and \$1.1 million at Centennial Manor.

That is a very tall challenge for us and that is why we were so happy to hear that the Province has made the commitment to move towards that hours of care standard over the next few years. Like all operators of long-term care facilities, we would like to get to the standard right away. But we recognize that it's more than money.

Finding the right and qualified staff is going to be a big effort. That is why we are anxious to see what Ontario's staffing plan for long-term care facilities will entail. We

understand that the plan will be released in December and we will go over it with great care.

Looking ahead to next year there are some important improvements we hope to make to both Hastings and Centennial Manors. Primary among them is a project to fully air condition Centennial Manor. Every summer it seems that the hot weather hangs on longer - making it difficult for our residents and staff.

We have applied to the province to obtain the approximately \$1 million that will be required to complete the work and we hope to hear back quickly. It is important to know if we will have the funding soon, so that we can get the tenders out. We want it done in time for the hot weather season.

One of the main projects at Hastings Manor in 2021 will be adding air conditioning into areas where we cook some food on the individual villas. We call these areas serveries. These areas get quite uncomfortable during the

summer months and this will solve that problem for our staff and residents.

As in past years, expanding the supply of affordable housing across the County, and in Quinte West and Belleville, will be a priority in 2021. The need continues to grow relentlessly, and we want to proceed with two significant projects this year.

A few weeks ago, the Provincial and Federal Governments announced the Rapid Housing Program that targets the use of modular-style housing units to get more units quickly into the supply mix. Staff have assessed our ability to access this new program and will be looking for your support to apply for 18 new units in Bancroft. Time is tight since construction must be complete by December 31, 2021, but they believe it is doable.

In addition, we want to move forward, in partnership with the City of Quinte West, to get the College Street Project underway. This will result in the construction of 32 new

units in the city where demand is high. There is a lot of work to be done but I am hopeful that together we can make it happen this year.

One of our signature and critically important projects that needs a mention is Home for Good, in the City of Belleville, that opened this past April. While we haven't been able to host an official opening, we are celebrating it as a truly successful model that is providing its tenants with life stabilization supports based upon the Housing First Model.

We need to make sure that we have the right amount of investment in its operations to continue its success and I understand that we will see something come forward in this year's operational budget.

These are just two projects, and we know that we need many more. I am going to ask the Community and Human Services Joint Committee to do a deeper dive into setting a five-year plan so that we can have construction projects,

“shovel-ready”, as they say. This gives us a running start when new Federal or Provincial programs get announced. It’s important to be ready to go as timelines are often tight, and the need is urgent.

And, while building new housing is one of our key priorities, I think we all must recognize and support the fact that new units will increase our operating costs, and we must be prepared to fund accordingly. It will affect our bottom line in future budgets, but that “comes with the turf”, as they say.

When it comes to childcare, COVID-19 has shone a light on the critical importance for working individuals and families to have access to it. It is critical to their ability to go to work and continue to contribute to our local and regional economies. We know the demand is significant and rising.

The need has particularly become critical in North Hastings. We have a very high wait list of 55 spaces and

there are very limited options currently in the area. Our staff have explored many options to expand with private partners without success. They are just not there. That means we need to look very closely, but urgently, at the establishment of a County-owned and operated facility.

Our Community and Human Services Director Erin Rivers, Cathy Utman, and their staff have been doing just that. I am looking forward to a report and proposal that our Joint Committee can assess and make recommendations to County Council as part of the budget process. We need to address the demand and if this is the right approach, let's execute it quickly and efficiently.

As we move through 2021, we will be moving into a period of recovery. With a vaccine becoming available and life returning to a pre-pandemic normal, we need to be ready to help our residents and businesses prosper.

The recovery will take shape locally, regionally, provincially, and nationally.

Our County certainly needs to play a part in the recovery efforts, and I believe we can best do that here at home and across Eastern Ontario. When we think locally, I mean not only in our home municipalities, but across the County.

This Council along with our staff have put in place some of the key drivers of renewed economic activity. Our planning staff, led by Director Harrow, helped us put our new Official Plan in place, and we secured the delegated approval powers to approve Official Plan Amendments ourselves. That in itself can shave months off of development applications. Time is critical when it comes to getting projects to the build stage and we are ready to move quickly.

Along with having our planning processes streamlined, we have been busy putting in place our new economic development strategies, our marketing initiatives, and our tourism plans. We are ready but we simply cannot just

wait for new opportunities to come to us. We must aggressively search them out, and we need to do that with our 14 member municipalities.

I believe the actions we take in 2021 and 2022 will be critically important to our collective economic health. We need to focus and ramp up our economic development activities starting now. We need to put our County resources and expertise into overdrive. This means that there will be a spotlight on our Planning and Development Department, and I know they will be up to the challenge.

Supporting recovery efforts across our great region is something that we can also play a big part in. Hastings County has always understood the value of working with our neighbours regionally. We have been an active member of the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus since its inception in 2002.

There really is no better example of a regional approach to economic development than working with the EOWC and

the Eastern Ontario Regional Network. This past year I was honoured to sit as Vice-Chair of the EOWC and look forward to continuing to be a member of the EORN Board of Directors.

Back in 2008, the EOWC recognized that our collective economic future was going to be tied to better access to high speed broadband services. Since that moment, the EOWC and our County as a member, has invested time, effort and considerable money on broadband and mobile broadband projects. Make no mistake, broadband projects are economic recovery projects.

As you know the EOWC has endorsed a new broadband project, called the Gig Project, that if approved by the Federal and Provincial governments, offers the promise of bringing 1 Gig or 1,000 Megabytes per second of speed to homes and businesses across our region.

This 'generational' project would solve our County and the entire region's demand for high speed internet services for

years to come. While it is costly, EORN estimates it between \$1.2 billion and \$1.6 billion, it makes very good sense to do it.

EORN has the evidence to prove that.

It commissioned two independent economists to assess the Gig Project and they came back with largely similar results. The benefits are substantial:

- An estimate of more than 16,000 jobs during the five years of construction;
- Consumer savings of \$650 million over ten years;
- \$400 million annually in cost avoidance by reducing commuting trips;
- Cutting the cost of healthcare delivery by some \$170 million per year by delivering at people's homes;
- Raising property values by 3% or \$7,500;
- Growing GDP by \$300 million

And the list goes on!

EORN and our CAO are deeply committed to this project and are working as hard as they can, along with the EOWC and EORN Boards of Directors, to convince Canada and Ontario that the time is right to do the Gig project, the EORN way. Anything you can do to voice support for the project will be welcome. Together we need to keep the pressure on.

We need keep our voice strong to ensure it happens.

As I close my remarks, let me take the opportunity to thank all of our area Municipal leaders, our countless volunteers and our Military men and women who have been there from the beginning of this pandemic and will continue to provide for us in the future.

We should all be proud of where we live.

Let me end by once again saying Thank You for your support. We have a lot to do in the next few years, but we will be up to the challenge.

We are strong today, we will be stronger tomorrow!

Thank you.

Rick Phillips, Warden Hastings County