



INAUGURAL REMARKS

by

WARDEN RODNEY COONEY

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Good Morning and Welcome to this the 165th Inaugural session of Hastings County Council.

First let me say thank you to Judge Byers. We certainly appreciate you taking the time to conduct the swearing in ceremony. It makes this day a very special one for us all and I want to take a moment and wish you congratulations on your recent retirement. Thank you.

I want to start by thanking everyone for coming who have meant a lot to me over my lifetime.

Thank you to my wife Lisa for allowing me to do this crazy stuff called politics, which does take me away from family time and business time. Before I go any further, I and my whole family want to present these flowers to you Lisa, as a symbol of our sincere gratitude for all your support over the years.

And thanks to my three girls Deanna, Candice and Jeanette who are starting to have families of their own which is why I think we all do what we do: to make our communities places to live, work and play.

History will be the judge of whether we succeed or not, but we want our communities to be sustainable.

And also, thank you to my Mom and Dad, Marvin and Lynda Cooney, whom Lisa and I are partners with in our farm and retail store. I have always been interested in municipal, provincial, national and international politics. I think it's genetic as Dad and my grandfather Theodore Cooney both sat on County Council.

I would also like to recognize the members of my local council and a number of staff who are here as well. Thank you for coming today. I very much appreciate your support.

My first day coming to County Council was in December 2010. We were still in the old Council chambers then and with all the wood and all the history, it was quite the feeling. Maybe a little overwhelming - to me anyways. Wondering whether or not I should be here. Carl Tinney offered me his hand and welcomed me as if we were old friends and I had been there forever. Thanks for that Carl.

Thank you to Terry Clemens who has been encouraging me to run for Warden the last few years.

I would like thank Rick Phillips for all of his dedication and commitment to Hastings County. Lisa and I have enjoyed Rick and Cheryl's friendship and look forward to continuing that friendship.

I should mention that Jim Duffin and Councillor Joanne Albert have finally got their wish. Since Carl and I share many of the same views, Jim and Joanne have been requesting that Carl and I not sit together for the past 6 years. Well, with my new assigned seating position, we won't be sitting together for a while!

I will say I am very honoured to sit up here but it's pretty special to sit in those seats too, with 13 Councillors, all of whom I consider friends.

Yes, there is a lot of history here and it's great to be a part of it. Everyone here takes pride in our County as well as each other's municipalities. I have never seen anyone put their own municipality ahead if it is a detriment to another municipality.

I guess I've been involved in community since I can remember. Whether playing on a team or coaching a team. I have been coaching hockey in Hockeyville, Stirling-Rawdon, for 4 decades. This year is the first year

I've ever coached family on a hockey team - my grandkids. I mention this because I believe Council is a lot the same with a team concept. All of us have a common goal to succeed and win for our residents.

In the days leading up to today, Mr. Pine and I had the opportunity to talk about the coming year and what opportunities and challenges might lie ahead for us here at the County. I also wanted to get a sense of what he and his senior management team saw as the priorities as we start this new term.

If there is one thing that I have observed since joining County Council is that there is never a shortage of issues for us to deal with. Providing services to thousands of people every day and working to meet their needs means we are rarely standing still. I expect nothing else in 2017 and 2018, but I am excited to pitch in as Warden and do what I can to support those efforts. You can count on it.

Each department has its role to play and we all are guided by our current Strategic Plan which gives a clear roadmap to follow and that we will do as best we can.

But let me be a bit more specific.

I know you, like me, are proud of the work that our Paramedic Service does day and night across all of the County including Belleville, Quinte West and our friends in Prince Edward County. This past year was another extremely busy one for our paramedics. They will have responded to more than 30,000 calls, an increase of 5.6% over last year and 10% since 2014. Our paramedics drove the equivalent of going to the Moon and back, twice! That translates into nearly 1,572,186 kms.

Given the geography and distances that they must cover, it is no wonder that there are occasions when response times to some calls are longer than we all would like. As Councillor Deline regularly reminds us at County Council, as he should, there seems to be particular challenges across central Hastings. Our Strategic Plan recognized this and I think the time is right to ask our CAO, Mr. Socha our Paramedic Chief and our Treasurer Ms. Susan Horwood and the joint EMS Committee to take a long, hard look at what we might be able to do about reducing those response times.

To that end Mr. Pine, Chief Socha and Ms. Horwood will together with the joint committee undertake a full review of options for the Committee and ultimately County Council to consider. Those options

will run the gamut from modifying the current deployment plan to assessing whether new investments in ambulances or base locations along with a financial plan to support any recommendations. I hope we can get that report to Council by the end of 2017.

I think you will agree with me when I say that paramedics face a particularly challenging environment in which to work. Whether it's the physical demands of lifting patients and equipment or as we are learning, the psychological demands on paramedics, we need to do all we can to support them. Doug and his senior management team along with our Human Resources staff will continue to look at opportunities to improve training and workplace practices to support paramedics across our service. We want to continue to be an employer of choice and I believe this a tangible way of doing that.

Being prepared for local or County-wide emergencies is another key responsibility of the department. I can only continue to encourage the on-going support that Doug and Leanne Latter provide to our respective municipalities across the County. Doug assures me that this kind of collaboration will continue. We hope for the best of course but

we will be prepared for any situation that might come our way this year.

Let me move on to Planning and Development, an area of great interest to me personally and I know to every member of County Council. I hope that having all members sit on the Planning Committee will be beneficial for staff and council members. Its work has direct effect on our local municipalities. We all need to work together this year especially as we move closer to finalizing our new Official Plan and all the policies that are going to shape our collective futures in the years ahead. It has been a long road but our Director Justin Harrow and his staff continue to put a lot of hard work into the draft plan and we need to thank him for their efforts. There is some light at the end of the tunnel Justin!

As we all know, we are in the midst of a very important examination of the current and future roles of economic development and tourism promotion. Each of us, along with our key senior staff, have provided our consultant, Michael Rowland of ChangeFocus with our thoughts and suggestions directly and through our recent workshop.

There were many good ideas and recommendations provided during the workshop and Mr. Rowland has already shared them with us and is now working towards a series of observations and recommendations for our consideration. As we agreed in Eldorado last month, we will be holding a special County Council meeting on January 17th where he will be presenting a full draft report on where he feels the County should be headed. It will be a single item agenda so that we can take the time we need to work through the draft report.

The plan is that he will take back what he hears on the 17th and then come back to us at the end of January at our regular meeting with his final report. I think I speak for all of us when I say that this is an important moment for the County. Let's put everything we have into it and see where it takes us.

Not to be outdone, our Community & Human Services department, formerly Social Services, has an ambitious agenda as well. Recent provincial government decisions are directly affecting our children's services group.

Our staff will be undertaking an extensive planning exercise in order to integrate a number of programs like the Early Years parenting and

literacy centers, the Better Beginnings/Better Futures and Ontario Early Years Child and Family centers into a cohesive system of services and supports to children 0-6 years and parents/caregivers. The new approach will be known as Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centres and will be managed locally by our County staff.

Housing Services also have a number of important activities on their plate in the coming year. Things like the implementation (and all the training that goes with it) of the YARDI system, a web-based, fully integrated platform that automates workflows and will be a big support to our staff who have to manage the nearly 2,000 affordable housing units the County is responsible for maintaining. We hope this new platform will bring some important efficiencies for our staff as they do their important work each day.

I am also pleased to inform County Council of a new and exciting pilot project that the department will be launching this year. Together with the South East LHIN and the Victoria Order of Nurses, a front-line, direct assisted living service to seniors who call 245/247 Bridge Street in Belleville their home. We think this kind of inter-agency collaboration

will provide improved services to these seniors and improve their health outcomes. Personally, I think the more we can work together with others the better our service delivery will be. We look forward to hearing back from Steve Gatward our Director later in the year.

On the affordable housing front we will continue with the sale of the single family dwelling units and the construction of 8 new multi – residential units scheduled for 2017 in the City of Belleville. This is part of our transformation plan and I know that the Joint Services Committee is anxious to keep this effort moving forward.

Finally, Steve and his staff in Ontario Works are going to be working hard to improve the way in which we connect our clients to employers. Getting someone a job is always the best form of assistance and if we can make good use of new technologies and approaches, I am confident we can get better employment outcomes that support clients and employers. And let me just say that our local companies continue to support our clients through employment opportunities and for that we should always be grateful.

Staying with the collaboration theme, I am really pleased to know from Larry Dean, our IT Director and overall technology guru that his efforts to form an IT Working Group with our local staff is gathering steam. Larry and his staff are working diligently on a number of shared projects, best IT practices and are providing support to us locally on many IT related initiatives. This is a great way of making use of the expertise here at the County for all of us in our home communities. Thank you Larry.

Larry, as some of you may know has, along with our CAO been involved with EORN to bring region-wide projects to life. He was very helpful in the last EORN effort to extend fiber optic services across Eastern Ontario and in our County particularly. It is already paying off for us in terms of better services to County facilities like our EMS bases and Hastings & Centennial Manors, at significantly lower operating costs. I expect he will continue to stay plugged into these regional groups and that is a very good thing.

I was interested to learn about our Open Data Initiative recently. Larry and the County will be undertaking an Open Data Initiative by providing full and open access to government-maintained GIS spatial data that can be actively leveraged by the general public, businesses and

communities for their own purpose. Open Data promotes active community participation and collaboration by opening access to information, and stimulates creative and innovative uses of this data to solve unique challenges.

The County's efforts on this front will initially be related to GIS 9-1-1 road networks and civic address information, and will increase in scope and quantity over time. Businesses that rely on accurate addressing and location data will be able to freely access current and accurate 9-1-1 data and incorporate the County data into a wide range of applications and services, ultimately improving services to the community at large.

Larry has promised to keep us informed as the work moves forward and I think this is a great example of the progressive nature of our staff.

Supporting our residents in our two long term care facilities, Hasting Manor and Centennial Manor is one of most critical responsibilities. Caring for some 363 residents and trying to make their daily lives the most enjoyable and healthy that we can, requires a huge effort by our staff. I know I speak for all of County Council when I say to Debbie

Rollins and her colleagues yours is a tough, tough job but please keep up the high standards of services that you have set and practice every day. It makes both Manors a place where so many people and their families want to be. It's their home.

To do this day in and day out requires an incredible amount of work. It is one of the most highly regulated and monitored services that we provide. The Province and its reporting requirements creates a tremendous degree of paper work for staff. A few years ago we determined that staff spend the equivalent of 33 full days just filling out forms and reports for the Province. Incredible.

Debbie assures me that we will continue to develop strategies and best practices within the homes to ensure the needs of all residents are met. Both homes will carry on developing our own in-house Responsive Behaviour teams to focus on interventions and pro-active responses to residents with behaviours. We hope that we will hear soon from the SE LHIN if either home has been accepted into the pilot project for Behavioural Supports Ontario. This would be an important and helpful initiative for us. We will of course, continue to collaborate with our community partners to ensure all resources available to us are accessed in the provision of care.

On the Home improvement front we look forward to completing the flooring replacement project at Hastings Manor. I think the residents and staff alike will be pleased with the results.

The Homes like many of our departments are beginning to face the challenges of retirements and recruiting new staff. Finding registered staff has been difficult and we expect continuing difficulties going forward this year.

This is a good point to touch on some Human Resource issues that are in store for us in the coming year.

Our CAO, along with Shaune Lightfoot our HR Director will be focusing on developing a full Succession Plan for the County. With some 34% or 296 of the 860 or so employees eligible to retire in 2020 we have to have a plan, a series of strategies, that will help us respond to this real tidal wave of retirements. The fact that most municipalities in Ontario are facing a similar situation, makes it even more important for us to ensure we can compete in the labour force market place.

As you know Mr. Pine has been Co-Chairing a group representing all the major staff organizations in the municipal sector along with OMERS and AMO to raise awareness and develop specific strategies to deal with the retirement wave. Jim has told us that in Eastern Ontario alone more than 11,000 current municipal employees will be eligible to retire by 2020. They run a range of jobs from PSWs, paramedics, nurses, finance staff, administrative groups and a host of other municipal employees. Our world is changing and Hastings County has to be prepared and in the thick of this issue. That is why a detailed action plan is essential. We look forward to getting work on this right away.

In addition to the succession plan matter, Shaune and his staff will be very busy this year negotiating new collective agreements with CUPE and the Ontario Nurses Association locals both of which represent our staff in Hastings and Centennial Manors. This is always a lot of work and we wish them well.

We are also committed to bringing in a new comprehensive Human Resources Information System that will cover all of our staff groups. This is a big effort and a complex one. All of the department heads are busy with this project and we hope it will all come together this year.

Let me end with HR on this: There is a direct line between the health of our employees and our financial bottom line. This year our employee benefit premiums are rising, again. This time by about 10% or an increase of some \$300,000 to our premium. Our rates reflect the experience (use) of our employees and the benefit plans we carry. All the research available supports this fact: the healthier the employee the less pressure on benefit plans and hence lower cost of the premiums for those plans.

So, in discussion with Shaune and Mr. Pine, we agreed that the time is right for a concerted effort and some investment by the County on an Employee Wellness Plan. We must put into place and into practice, a plan that helps our employees stay healthier and well. It may sound simple but it will take creativity, innovation and a strong commitment from every part of our organization. I firmly believe in it and I will support it.

Behind the scenes, but front and center in our operations, is our Treasury department. Sue Horwood, Sue Bell and their staff are the rudder that keeps our financial affairs headed in the right direction. We

may not see their work out in the community but without their efforts no department would be able to properly carry out their services.

Every time there is a new program or service proposed Sue and her financial analysts take the time and use their expertise to assess the financial risks that might be associated with them and gives the department heads and County Council solid professional advice. This a key to our ongoing fiscal capabilities. Keep up the good work Sue.

Sue and her staff have served our financial interests year in and year out. The County is financially sound and we have a strong foundation to do our work. Every year she leads our annual budget process and this year will be no different. We will lean on Sue once again as we shortly get into our 2017 budget process but we know she is up to the challenge!

Finally, like the Planning Committee, I believe all members of County Council would benefit from sitting on the Finance, Property & Personnel Committee. This would help us with the important matters that the Committee will be dealing with and give every member of Council a voice on the Committee.

In order to change the membership of both the Planning and Finance Committees we need to amend our Procedural Bylaw. That process begins with notice of the intent to change the Bylaw and we need to give at least 30 days notice. Council will formally consider the amendments at its regular meeting at the end of January and the new membership will take place beginning in February. That means of course our current committee membership and schedules will carry on through January.

Let me end with this. The support we get from our CAO and his office every day helps us move the County forward. Cathy, Sharon, Lisa, Jim Duffin and of course Mr. Pine, let me say thank you for supporting me as a Councillor and now as the Warden. I really do appreciate it and I know from talking to past Wardens they too have found this support to be unwavering.

Thank you once again, to all of Council, I appreciate your support more than you know.

Thank you.