



WARDEN'S REMARKS
INAUGURAL SESSION – DECEMBER 06, 2018

Good Morning and Welcome

Let me start by saying thank you for your support in electing me as your Warden for the next two years. I am humbled by it and commit to working as hard as I can for you and your communities.

Let me also thank all of you who are attending this Inaugural session of Hastings County Council including a number of past wardens. We are so pleased that you could join us today.

This is indeed a very special moment for all of us. Today is a day of new beginnings. It's the start of a four year term of office and for nine members it's the first day of your role as a member of Hastings County Council. I can say with some certainty that four years from now you will be wondering...where did the time go?

So enjoy this moment and I hope you will agree that it is the start of something very good.

New beginnings offer the promise of positive change and improvement. We need to look forward to the next few years and find ways to enrich the lives of the people we serve here in Hastings County. We need to discover new avenues to support the growth of our communities and at the same time preserve the wonderful traditions that make our County so special. The love of our natural heritage, the beauty of our lands and waters and the bonds we hold dear in our municipalities help bring us together in this chamber to work as a Council for the whole of the County.

I also sincerely hope that you will find what those of us who are returning members already know; our services know no internal boundaries. This Council works for every member municipality, all of our residents and our entire business community no matter where they are located across this great County. Think of the County as a family. Families stick together, families support each other and

while we may disagree from time to time we will find ways to resolve those differences. Together we are stronger.

As we heard in our orientation session we recognize that our actions as County Councillors set the tone for the whole organization. This chamber is the place where respectful dialogue takes place. We will share ideas, thoughtfully debate issues and in the end set the course for our operations over the next four years.

I believe and endorse fully the County's basic mission...to support families, individuals and communities through the provision of our services. There is no more important job.

We need to do what we can to help those that require our assistance, whether it's a hand up in times of financial crisis, providing a clean, safe and affordable place to live, ensuring that an ambulance gets to an emergency as quickly as it can or making sure our seniors and vulnerable residents of the Manors get the care and support they deserve.

This is my pledge. I will do all that I can to help this Council, our wonderful staff and our partner municipalities to provide support and assistance to our residents and businesses. I give you my full and complete commitment!

I want to express once more my very sincere gratitude to all of you for your support to serve as your Warden for the next two years. If you need me to come to your community...just pick up the phone (or send Cathy a note) and I will do my level best to be there.

So, let me get on with business.

It's hard in the short time that I have this morning to cover the entire breadth of our operations so I will address just a few of them but let me reassure all the department heads, all of your work is critical to the success of our service to the people who call the County home and the businesses that are the backbone of our local economies.

Looking out at the next couple of years I sense that we will be facing a period of change. Like all municipal governments we have to pay attention to the shifting priorities of both the Provincial and Federal Governments. We already know that in Ontario there is a new sheriff in town as they say and the Ford Government has an ambitious agenda to reshape the landscape.

We have seen some aspects of their vision including their recent announcement around changes coming to the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Programs.

We were very pleased to receive an acknowledgment from the Minister with regard to the innovative way we work with local businesses to understand the skills they need in employees and then help our OW clients be job ready. This matching of clients with skills and talents to the local job market has produced tremendous results. Supporting our business community's employee needs means our OW clients are finding jobs and as we regularly say....the best form of assistance is a job.

I know in talking to our staff that we look forward to providing whatever advice and assistance to the Province that we can to enhance those two critically important programs. We will need to position our services to respond quickly and effectively when the final changes are made to them. We will be ready!

I believe all of us in this Chamber this morning understand the essential need to improve the amount of safe, affordable housing in our communities. Housing is fundamental to the health of citizens and our social fabric. While we have done well to build 207 new units over the past ten years we are going to need to work together with our city partners, each of our local municipalities, the province and the federal government to do much more.

Later this year we should see the completion of our 40 unit Home for Good development. This, I believe, is a true feather in our collective caps. It has brought together nearly 20 different organizations that serve the hardest to

house population and it will be a model that can be replicated across Ontario. This is going to be something for us to celebrate.

Erin Rivers, our Director of Community and Human Services, and her staff, are also charting the way forward on our Housing and Homelessness Strategy for the next five (5) years. Working with our Joint Committee members from Belleville and Quinte West the Strategy will be our trusted guide and I know County Council will be anxious to see it as it develops over the coming months.

Let me turn to our paramedic services. Some of you may have been following the recent Joint Committee for Emergency Services discussions about the ever increasing call volumes and the stress it is creating on our ambulance operations and our paramedic staff. Our Chief Paramedic Doug Socha and our CAO, Mr. Pine recently provided the Joint Committee with a report on the service along with a series of recommendations to help provide some relief to it.

One of the primary recommendations was a call for a reduction in the use of ambulances for inter-facility calls. 75% of these calls are for non-life threatening transport and frankly we should not and cannot continue to use ambulances for these calls. Chief Socha estimates the cost to our service at some \$700,000 annually and perhaps more importantly is the difficulty of ensuring our vehicles are available for a life threatening call.

We have informed the hospital that we are seeking to reduce those kinds of transfer calls by 50% and we will ask Council's support to put those operational savings aside to help fund additional paramedics and vehicles in the coming years. It just makes sense for us to do this.

Staff have also been directed by the Joint Committee to take this year to plan and design a new ambulance base in Central Hastings. The Service needs to respond to the ever increasing call volumes and make sure that ambulances are housed in the right locations, in the right

facilities and staffed appropriately. Working with our Facilities Department staff will be coming back to the Joint Committee and this Council with their recommendations later in the year.

One of the things that sets our Service apart from others, I believe, has been the drive to be a leader in innovation. That drive of course is the result of the vision of Chief Socha. He has continually looked out into the future through research and the engagement of non-traditional partners like NASA and the Department of Defence here in Canada.

Doug, I for one, encourage you to keep advancing our paramedic service by carrying on this approach and I know that you will be able to apply that research particularly in the area of community paramedicine. Those efforts will bring better medical outcomes to our residents across the County. It's going to be a busy year for the Paramedic Service.

I mentioned our Facilities Department. Our County has more than \$300 million in assets that need constant attention. Dan Pisani our department head is busy developing a comprehensive asset management plan while at the same time tackling the capital issues on a number of our key facilities like our Manors. Having a solid asset management plan just makes good financial sense for us.

I would like to turn to Human Resources for a moment. I think we sometimes take for granted the kind of work that goes on behind the scenes as it relates to our employees. As you know, the County is a large employer with more than 870 full and part time staff. Caring for our staff is critically important to every department's operations. It is not an easy job and it takes professionalism and commitment from Department Heads who get the support they need from Mr. Lightfoot's staff. In talking with our CAO and Shaune, the next couple of years will require a lot effort by the department.

Here are just a few of the issues on our Human Resources agenda:

- Executing our Corporate Health and Wellness Strategy through initiatives like integrated health coaching and manager training;
- Developing a competency framework for a new talent management strategy for non-union and management positions;
- Completing the installation of a new Human Resources Information System (HRIS) that is critically needed for all of departments;
- Undertaking contract negotiations covering three bargaining units including our paramedics and long term care employees.

I can also assure Council that if you have human resource questions that you might be struggling with just pick up the phone and call Shaune. He has over the years helped many of our municipalities. He and his team are

consummate professionals and they will do their best to help you. Sorry to add to your workload Shaune!

I want to also however just mention the wonderful work that our Long Term Care Director, Debbie Rollins, has launched in both Hastings and Centennial Manors. You will hear much more about this in the coming weeks and months.

Debbie is leading a real transformation of the way we see, operate and care for residents of both homes. Debbie and her staff team are moving towards a truly socialized model of care and away from an institutionalized approach. As she says regularly, our Manors are often the last home our residents will have, we need to make it the best that it can be for them and their families.

This is not going to be easy and it will take time but with the support of the Long Term Care Joint Committee and this Council I know she will be successful. We owe it to our residents to change and I am confident County Council will continue to support you.

While we are working to change the 'culture' in our Homes there is no doubt that the funding of our operations needs greater attention from the Province. Ontario is committing to building 5,000 new long term care beds and we applaud them for that initiative. However, we can't lose sight of the fact that our current operations must be funded at higher levels so that we can hire more frontline staff and help us move closer to the universal goal of at least 4 hours of daily direct care for every resident in our Homes.

This Council will have to continue to make the case for this with our local MPPs and the Government in general. If that means going to Toronto to speak directly with ministers and members we will absolutely do that!

And any time you as a member have a chance to speak with our local MPPs please take the opportunity to do that. It all helps.

Let me end with three additional things.

A few years ago we brought Information Technology out of the proverbial shadows. Everything we do here runs over some technology platform. Without IT we could not possibly operate any of our services whether its line departments like our Homes, paramedic services or planning. Larry and his team keep our systems secure and safe. It doesn't happen without constant care and vigilance and for that we appreciate all of Larry's efforts.

One IT project that I am very much looking forward to is the results of the six month pilot project with Hastings Highlands. Larry and his staff have been providing the municipality direct IT support services as a pilot project. We wanted to see if it was possible and feasible to offer this kind of support to other member municipalities because IT services are critically important to all of us at the local level. I understand he will be back to us in February with the results.

As said at the start of my remarks I simply don't have the time to speak to the work of every department and I apologize for that. So let me end with just a couple of final comments.

Each of you as Councillors will come to know and find comfort in the way our finances are managed here at the County. Our Director of Finance, Susan Horwood, is one of the finest Treasurers in the province. Sue is a rare breed in the field...she cares for our financial situation as if it was her own but sees the broader needs of our County. Whether it's helping us to determine the best way to fund improved broadband services or enhancing our paramedic operations she works with everyone to make those things happen. Our finances are in great hands!!

Growing our economic base in every member municipality has to be a key strategic goal for us. Led by our Director Justin Harrow, we have a newly updated Official Plan that will guide our development and decision making into the future. We have also just approved an exciting new

branding strategy “*Wildly Authentic*”. All the hard work of the Economic and Tourism Development Committee has brought us to this point and now, County Council needs to step up to the plate and ensure that the branding strategy gets the resources it needs to be truly successful. This year’s budget will need to make that a reality.

Finally, let me commit to you that as your Warden, I will continue to ensure that Hastings County remains an integral part of the Eastern Ontario Wardens’ Caucus. Along with our CAO we need to support the EOWC in its constant efforts to advocate for our entire region.

And along with the EOWC we will need to participate in the next EORN project to improve cellular networks across our County and eastern Ontario. That \$213 million project is getting close to getting the provincial and federal green light. All 13 Counties and 8 of the 10 separated municipalities including Belleville and Quinte West have committed to contributing \$10 million to the project. It is essential to grow our business community, provide

another way for people to connect to high speed internet services and improve safety for those who live here and those who are travelling to and through our region.

We will keep our voice strong to ensure it happens. Our CAO, as Co-Lead for EORN is heavily involved in the effort and I urge him to keep up his efforts!

So 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.

Together we are strong!