

FINAL

**Warden is Rick Phillips**  
***Introductory Remarks***  
**County Council, April 30**

I want to take a moment to take stock of where we are.

Ontario's first case of COVID 19 appeared 8 weeks ago.

8 weeks.

It feels like it has been a lot longer than that.

Much has changed in our lives, and across the County.

We have done a tremendous amount of work – and we have had to make more tough decisions than I can count.

All of it has been done to fight a cruel and unforgiving virus.

We have had to lay people off.

We have asked others to hang on and be patient.

We have had to ask people to step-up and serve on the frontline, at a scary time.

I am incredibly proud of all these people.

It's not just our paramedics, Manor staff and nurses.

Many municipal employees are in this fight – social services, public housing, cleaning staff, waste management, bylaw officers and first responders, in all of our communities.

There are too many to mention.

And obviously, residents and businesses are in it with us.

To quote Premier Ford, we are all in this together.

14.5 million people are working together.

The spirit of teamwork has been inspiring -- and it has served us well.

I have never seen such cooperation, patience, trust... between all levels governments.

Without a doubt, it has saved lives.

Going forward, it is our best bet to save livelihoods and businesses.

From the start, those have been our goals.

We have worked to keep people healthy and safe.

And we are working to help people weather the most difficult economic challenge of our lives.

We started earlier than everyone else.

Our paramedics have been on the frontline since February.

They served the first flights from China that landed at CFB Trenton in February.

They have been on the frontline longer than any paramedic service in Canada.

Why did we move so quickly? And why did those people have to stay put for 14 days?

We have been working to prevent a spike that could overwhelm our communities and local health care system.

To fully appreciate that risk, we have to look to places like Wuhan, Italy, Spain, and New York.

New York's school board has lost 68 people. 28 teachers are dead.

More than 4,000 of New York's police officers tested positive.

4,000 of them.

31 officers have died.

We don't have those stories... and we need to make sure that we don't.

In Ontario, and in other places, the biggest challenge has been senior's homes and long term care.

30 deaths have been linked to one long-term care home in Bobcaygeon.

24 dead in Hagersville.

These are small communities, like ours.

A month ago, three staff tested positive at Hastings Manor.

28 staff had to self-isolate, almost overnight.

The Manor's team, led by our Director Debbie Rollins, worked with every department in the home to make sure residents were protected and cared for.

We found protective equipment for them – gloves, masks and gowns.

Getting it has been a challenge, around the world.

And around the world, we have seen how hard it is to contain the virus.

To date, our staff are doing it.

Ten residents have tested positive, in a home that cares for more than 250 residents. The outbreak has been contained to one small area of the home.

Five employees who have tested positive remain at home. We wish them a full and speedy recovery.

When Premier Ford talks about Ontario's frontline heroes, he's referring to our people.

Sadly, this week we have lost two residents.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the family. That's hard on our people too.

They are working through fear and tears to look after these residents.

Thankfully, Centennial Manor is clear.

Credit goes to staff there, and to residents and families.

They have been making their own sacrifices.

We have succeeded because our response has been strong, fast and sincere.

Chief Socha didn't waste time.

He told us we needed to hire six more full-time community paramedics.

We moved from 24 hours a week to 525.

The County, with the support of the cities of Belleville and Quinte West and Prince Edward County, made the decision to fund that -- immediately.

It was no small measure. The annual cost is about \$750,000.

But we knew that we needed to do it – to keep people safe.

We decided to worry about collecting from the province later.

We have had to trust that other levels of government will have our back.

And I believe they do.

Our fast action paid off.

Our paramedics are assisting with testing -- and they are supporting long-term care, retirement homes, local hospitals and homeless shelters.

Homeless people are vulnerable, and protecting them can be challenging.

So again, we moved quickly to provide shelter and care.

Erin Rivers and her team, led by Jamie Lee Osmond, did it all in a week.

They created a safe, isolation center from scratch, at the Belleville YMCA.

They found the location and negotiated an agreement.

They arranged all the necessary medical and operating protocols.

They mobilized community partners – and they found the protective gear.

Our people did it all.

We are also drawing on our new Home for Good.

We built it to house 40 chronically homeless people from across our communities.

In middle of this pandemic, we have been moving them in.

32 people so far.

The rest will be in by June 1.

We are still in the middle of this fight.

The weather is getting warmer.

People who have been staying home will want to get outside.

Businesses are hurting.

However, we still have a way to go.

The provincial and federal governments have been making plans to open up again.

It won't happen as soon as we would like, and it won't happen all at once.

Regrettably, the virus makes decisions that are beyond our control.

We need to realize that people will get frustrated.

We will hear it, see it and feel it.

We will get phone calls and emails. People will blow off steam on social media. Some of it will be directed at us.

We need to take that in stride.

Some people are worried. Some are angry. Some are fed up.

At a time like this, people get defensive and point fingers.

It's normal -- but it is not typical.

Typically, people have been helpful, caring and inspiring.

Because times like this also bring out the best in people.

Hundreds of people are working on the frontline.

Thousands of local people are helping out.

Across Canada, almost 40 million people are rowing in the same direction – in a way that we have not seen since World War 2.

Looking at the big picture, our story has been amazing.

So I just want to thank you. I want to thank our frontline workers – and all staff. And I want to thank residents for bearing with us.

We've done well.

Someday, people will look back on this.

I hope that they will remember that we were strong when we needed to be strong – and fast when we needed to be fast.

I hope that they will remember that we were good to one another. That we were caring and supportive.

I know that they will remember that we kept people safe.

Now the spotlight is shifting toward the economic recovery.

Here again, we have to be smart, caring and creative.

We have seen what we can accomplish when we work together and help each other.

But right now, I think we should all take a brief moment to recognize that the County, and our communities, have risen to the occasion and performed well.