

Warden's Inaugural Address
November 23, 2022

Good Morning County Council, MP Cheryl Gallant, MPP John Yakabuski, your Worships Mayors Steve Bennett, Sue D'Eon, Lisa McGee, Tom Sidney and Ron Gervais, Colonel John Vass and Acting Formation Sergeant Major Chief Warrant Officer Todd Buchanan from Garrison Petawawa and all of our esteemed guests that are so graciously joining us this morning as we officially move forward as the 2022-2026 Council of the County of Renfrew.

I would like to acknowledge the members of the public for taking the time to watch us on YouTube. I also need to note and express our thanks to Warden Robinson for joining us today. I want to assure her we will honor and emulate to the best of our abilities her leadership and tireless work on behalf of our community. We will uphold her efforts over the next four years.

No matter what we do in life, quite often our own personal journey weaves together with those closest to us. They see us at our most unguarded moments and protect us, support us and offer support and wise counsel. A big thank you to my wife Alanna who has been a strong partner and a big part of my 34-year journey of working with others to better our community. I also need to speak of my tall, beautiful and delightful baby. Lily, as your father you make me proud. Your strength and humour continue to inspire me.

When I speak of inspiration - my parents provided me enough to last me a lifetime. Times like this I think of my late parents – Shirley and Earl Emon and Alanna's late parents – Anna and Neil Swayze. We treasure the impact they had on our lives in years past and we still do.

Before I speak about moving forward, I want to touch on the events of the last two and a half years and their profound impacts on our community. Our world was suddenly upended and shut down in March of 2020, brought on by a terrifying fast-moving global pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed our world and, in those frightening early days, our community came together to support one another. We rallied behind first responders and health care workers, collected personal protective equipment, washed our hands, stayed six feet apart and masked-up.

Thank you to our community, our doctors, nurses, paramedics, and support staff, along with our County staff, residents and businesses and everyone who cared enough about the community to take care of themselves and others. Our community listened, adhered to public health protocols and that resolve occurred despite the isolation and disconnection from our family and friends in the midst of global and neighborhood uncertainty.

More than half of the last term of council was overshadowed and dominated by the pandemic. We listened, we cared for our friends, our neighbors, our families and stayed the course as an organization and as a community. We innovated daily, perhaps hourly, pivoted our programs and continued to deliver the exceptional services residents and businesses have come to expect.

Yes, unfortunately there were disruptions our community could not overcome; closures of our facilities, a delay to our much-loved recreation, culture and seniors' programs, all in an effort to keep people safe.

While most of us were focused on weathering the storm, there is no doubt that families were changed forever and businesses struggled or did not recover. Seventy-seven County residents passed away from COVID-19. Many more were hospitalized. I'd like to have a moment of silence now to honour and remember our families, friends and neighbors who were lost during the pandemic.

(MOMENT OF SILENCE)

I would like to congratulate all eight of our returning council colleagues and also to welcome nine new councillors to council chambers. Ahead of us we have a lot of hard, but exciting and rewarding work. We are and will chart a course forward for our entire community, together we will build our community, and create and expand opportunities for everyone to succeed and thrive.

As we leave here today we know a team approach will be needed across our community, and a team approach around this chamber is paramount. Previous Councillors have set the bar for what a constructive, professional council can be. This morning I assure you that I will do everything I can to ensure that same spirit of respect and collaboration resides in this Chamber. I know I can count on everyone in Chambers to commit to this same approach over the next forty plus months.

Politics unfortunately has become increasingly angry and divisive; this council can demonstrate here and at your home council that there is a better way. I am sure in the coming months there will be sharp disagreements and heated debates. Some will challenge other's viewpoints or premises and confront each other's opinions. Overriding that will be a shared commitment - we 17 members, together with an extremely talented staff- are here to work together toward the same goal: to make our home, all 7,645 square kilometers of the County of Renfrew the best community it can be.

HOUSING

We have a low rental vacancy rate and as a growing community we require a greater supply of housing. The last two years has been especially difficult for some of our citizens. We suspect there are people in our County who spend up to 80% of their income on rent. These are people who deserve to live with dignity. They shouldn't have to choose between heating their homes and buying groceries. We must act to keep housing affordable in our community by expanding housing opportunities in creative ways.

We will look to encourage more rental housing, more townhouses and starter homes, more housing options for seniors and integration of new affordable housing units in neighbourhoods across our County. A diverse and plentiful supply of housing that is affordable, together with housing options for those who need support is a critical part of our community's future.

That is why in my first 100 days I will ask for Council's support in establishing a County Advisory Group on Housing. This Advisory Group will bring key stakeholders together to examine best practices and to explore all possible tools and incentives our community can offer, to enable developers, non-profits and community agencies to build more housing in general and more attainable/affordable housing in particular.

We will ask this Advisory Group to get to work quickly, and report back to Council with their ideas and solutions, so that by this time next year we can begin implementing their recommendations. It is not possible for our community to move forward on some of the homes without financial support from the other levels of government. We will continue to push for more dialogue and a partnership between municipalities, the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada to achieve more housing supply. I will also be working hard with the

Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus as they begin to define and roll out their plans to work with public and private partners to build 7,000 new units in 7 years, across the entire region.

Growth needs to pay for growth and one thing is for sure, we need a practical financial framework to deliver and keep in good repair complete communities. Municipalities do that best!!

The Province has recently introduced some significant legislation to deal with the housing issues at large, and County Council will be following the implications closely to determine how it must and can align its strategies with these new greater goals.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Guided by staff we will be undertaking a strategic planning review in January. Our existing Strategic Plan has guided us well. Proper planning allows us to deliver maximum performance and reflects the areas we need to develop or improve on as we work in our community.

OUR ECONOMY

We will continue with a targeted approach to economic development that builds on our local strengths. We will use our existing relationships with our businesses across many sectors to open up other doors to global opportunities that will bring more jobs and investment, and encourage a new labour force through workforce attraction initiatives, to our community. By talking to them we will become informed and inform on the leading research and development in our local sectors to encourage new business growth.

Our vision for growth will be anchored by the fostering of a culture of innovation in our community. Our County, our community is a developer of and a showcase for new ideas, approaches and solutions. Council and staff have made no secret of our passion for innovation. I am convinced that we have in our community both the talent and the creativity to develop community, life and world changing ideas.

We will stand beside and fully engage and support small businesses, frontline staff, non-profit organizations, institutions and researchers as they embrace the power of new ideas and processes. We will work to combine new ideas and technologies to create not only better services for residents, but also new opportunities for new businesses to begin and for existing businesses to grow.

To encourage innovation, start ups and grow our economy, we must ensure that employers can find the talent they need. We will continue to work with known and as yet unknown partners in embracing a workforce development strategy for our community. It starts by ensuring everyone, across all demographics in our community know where tomorrow's opportunities will be. They can pursue the right education, the right training/upgrading and acquire the right skills. They may be taking on new roles in a 21st century economy or replacing the person they work beside.

While helping everyone in our community to find meaningful work or fulfilling careers, we will also welcome new residents from across the province, the country and the world. We will renew our commitment to a diverse and inclusive community. Our growth includes not only how we welcome new residents, but also how we welcome visitors and how we keep our residents committed to our community and identifying this as home. Visitors are drawn here to experience our history, our culture, our outdoors and our facilities.

We will also continue to work collaboratively with our First Nations partners as we continue to strengthen our Memorandum of Understanding for economic development efforts. We will through time reach out to the member communities of the Algonquins of Ontario and initiate relationships with them.

CANADIAN NUCLEAR LABORATORIES

Ten years ago, when the Federal government was moving the operation of what was then Atomic Energy of Canada Limited to a Government Owned Contractor Operated model, we inserted ourselves into the process to represent our community. Now as the government embarks on a review of the contract we will insist we be a part of the process and speak on behalf of our community.

VIRTUAL TRIAGE AND ASSESSMENT CENTRE

Our innovative answer to providing assistance to our community which was developed during the early days of COVID is still a work in progress. Together with our community partners we have grown this essential service to offer our community a medical treatment model which isn't impacted or constrained by the traditional bricks and mortar limitations.

This model has completed over 64,000 virtual assessments with family physicians since it's inception in early 2020, diverting more than 1,000 patients per month

from the emergency departments, and is recognized as the next phase in caring for Ontario residents which are underserved. VTAC is seen as the next service model in a number of communities across Ontario. VTAC needs permanent funding and we will continue to educate about the service, it's successes, it's potential and discuss VTAC with the Minister of Health.

NOT FOR PROFITS

Our community is fortunate to have a number of partners who contribute to our community well-being. They are a valuable and valued addition to our community and a supportive resource to many in the County of Renfrew. We will engage with them and gain a broader understanding of their services and plans for the future. This will allow for future planning and coordination of services.

BUDGET

As we address the challenges we face and position ourselves for the opportunities that are in front of us, there will be significant pressures on our budget. However we must continue to live within our means. Some tough decisions loom on service levels and the need for more partnerships. I am confident we will get good and helpful advice from our staff.

There will always be taxes. Our job is to ensure we raise income, invest sensibly and spend community money wisely.

BUTTERFLY MODEL OF CARE

Our Long-Term Care homes have been hard hit by COVID. Lockdowns, screenings, vaccines and outbreaks. Words that dominated the news for months on end. Our staff and Director Blackmore worked tirelessly to protect the residents and staff.

Our two homes are not just four walls. They are mini communities, almost like a small village for many of the people who live there and come to visit loved ones.

Miramichi Lodge and Bonnechere Manor have always delivered a high level of care and comfort. We look forward to the continued roll out of the Butterfly Model of Care without COVID looking over the shoulders of staff and residents.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS

Increasingly we are hearing about mental health and addictions as issues of concern from our Paramedic Service and Community Services Departments. During this year we will engage with our staff, other service providers, Public Health and Not for Profits to learn more about our community.

HIGHWAY 17

Our community waited for years to gain the benefit of slow expansion of the highway in the Eastern end of our community. We will continue to monitor the progress on the extension of 417 in the McNab Braeside to Renfrew section. At the same time, we will begin to offer suggestions on timelines, highway design models and provide information on the remainder of Highway 17 in our community. Planning this massive and complex construction project will take time and it is time for the Province to start.

This highway remains a critical piece of Canada's transportation infrastructure and is increasingly a very busy highway as goods are moved across Ontario to destinations in Canada. The usage of this highway has more than likely surpassed its design and it needs replacement to continue to meet the demand by many sectors of our economy and our society.

LOOKING OUT

We have been fortunate to have established the County of Renfrew as a hardworking and involved presence at AMO, ROMA, EORN, EOWC, EOLC and inform of the innovations we develop in our community. We are fortunate to have the support of our staff and also from organizations in our community as we step outside of our borders to inform, to lobby and to speak on behalf of our community.

This will continue and we will encourage our staff to share their expertise as presenters at conferences both inside and outside of our community. Their successes allow us to pursue and develop more opportunities for success.

ONTARIO WINTER GAMES 2023

We are weeks away from welcoming 2700 plus participants and 6000 spectators to our community. February 2nd kicks off this premier athletic event. We will mobilize volunteers, sponsors and community members to welcome everyone. The events will be free and a must see for athletes, non-athletes and the merely curious.

Christmas is coming and we have some really exciting gifts on our website for everyone in the family. We are curious to see who will be the furthest away from our community who will be wearing OWG clothing.

CONCLUSION

I want to reaffirm to our staff under the leadership of CAO Craig Kelley and his team that we watch you and marvel at the work you do for our community across our Departments. We will continue in our partnership with you to establish a culture of caring and mutual respect as we work together. Thank you for your work, your energy, your ideas and your commitment to improving and serving in our community.

I look forward to continuing our partnerships with the business community, with our public sector partners, with labour groups and neighbourhood associations, volunteers, non-profits and entrepreneurs, to build our community together. As the area's largest employer (and the largest in Eastern Ontario), we are so fortunate to host Garrison Petawawa in our community as they are a valuable resource as we serve our community and an important part of our local economy. Colonel Vass has become a willing partner and advocate for us in many ventures. Please extend our appreciation, admiration and support to the serving members on the Garrison.

Our relationship with the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan has been slowed by the constraints of COVID and we will work to strengthen it and renew our mutual resolve to move forward. Council and staff have read and taken to heart the Truth and Reconciliation report and it's 94 recommendations. We will continue to act on them. Noojimokamig "A place to Heal" is our commitment to you of our desire to ensure we listen to you our family, friends and neighbors today, tomorrow and forever.

Our relationship with our partner and friend the City of Pembroke continues to be strong. They fund and develop with us a number of necessary and critical community services in our community. This relationship is guided by a shared desire to meet the needs of our community and always evolving our relationship with our community. Mayor Gervais please extend our appreciation to your council and staff.

Our relationship with our member municipality continues to develop as we pick through the constant changes sent to us by the province. Change will and should continue to encourage us to work together, to share services and to develop new models as partners. We will be speaking more, and a lot this year about new relationships as we are increasingly challenged to continue to serve our community. This council and our staff will foster and encourage those discussions for cooperation and shared services. Technology, limited funds and a desire to maintain services will no doubt drive this conversation in many chambers.

Across our community we have first class facilities: galleries, libraries, rinks, parks and museums. We have beautiful heritage main streets. We have outstanding trails and natural areas. We can and do create a showcase that can bring the world to our doorstep. We will join with you to show case the many attractions in your communities which make our community such a perfect place to live.

I strongly believe we are on the right path to meet the challenges and opportunities that will be before us in the coming years. I have every confidence in our Council and staff, working together with our community, to achieve our goals and realize our dreams.

I am grateful to Councillors Michael Donohue and Jennifer Murphy for nominating me. I am humbled and deeply touched by your kind words and the vote of confidence from Council. This is truly a special day for me as I appear before council, before my community, with you before our community.