

## **Inaugural Address December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 – Warden Debbie Robinson**

As we gather this morning I would like to acknowledge on behalf of Council and our community that we are meeting on traditional territory of the First Nations. We would like to thank the Algonquin people and express our respect and support for their rich history, and we are extremely grateful for their many and continued displays of friendship.

We also thank all the generations of people who have taken care of this land for thousands of years.

Good morning and thank you for being here today. To begin I would like to express my gratitude to my Mover Councillor Michael Donohue, and my Seconder Councillor James Brose, for their advice and support this past year and for my nomination as warden for a second term.

I also wish to thank all County Council members for their belief in my leadership and their vote of confidence. Together we will enter 2021 with open minds and the drive to serve our residents with the utmost dedication.

These are most certainly difficult times. Together, in 2020, we faced significant challenges with COVID 19 however we have been uncompromising in ensuring service standards to our community were maintained.

As a Council, we have seen many changes in government priorities, and government policies. These changes have come at a pace that has often

been quite rapid, requiring us to swiftly take a stand, push back, partner and negotiate. Together Council and staff will continue to tackle whatever changes come our way.

The County of Renfrew has always been an innovator, and a tough negotiator, and those traits will continue to serve us well as we head into 2021 and beyond, of that I am certain.

Our strategic plan identifies our priorities and offers us direction that allows us to focus on actions to achieve beneficial results for our community, and lead to success for the future. It is the benchmark against which we continue to measure ourselves, our strengths and capacity to meet the needs of our residents.

Our Service Delivery Review Project has unveiled other areas where we can further advance our goals and create a roadmap for future County-wide initiatives. I am looking forward to working on the various recommendations as a Council this coming year.

In 2021, we will continue to focus on engaging Governments at the Provincial and Federal levels, maintaining fiscal sustainability, implementing service delivery reviews, and accelerating our use of Technology.

Attaining success also depends on continuing to maintain and grow partnerships with our 17 municipalities, senior governments, Canadian Nuclear Laboratories, Garrison Petawawa, Algonquins of Pikwakanagan, EOWC, AMO, FCM, ROMA, the media, and our local stakeholders.

CNL's dedication to secure its future as a critical research and development institution here in the Ottawa Valley, will contribute significantly to the stabilization of our local economy now and in the years to come.

I am especially looking forward to our continued collaboration with Garrison Petawawa, an incredibly important asset to the Town of Petawawa, the County of Renfrew, to our nation and indeed the international community. I am pleased that we have Col. John Vass here with us today.

I also wish to acknowledge that we are on unceded territory of the Algonquin First Nation. It was my privilege to meet with the Chief of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan this past year. Chief Wendy Jocko, her council and Renfrew County Council have a shared goal of improving the quality

of life and economic well-being of our communities. We must build on this relationship in 2021, and take deliberate steps to advance the historic Memorandum of Understanding signed by our two councils in 2016.

Working together with our partners, this Council will continue to move forward on successful projects like the Highway 417 expansion, completion of the Algonquin Trail, and increased Active Transportation projects.

We are also ready to tackle new challenges including sustainable funding for the Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre.

Created in response to the province of Ontario's directive to create COVID-19 assessment and testing Centres, RC VTAC achieved that and so much more. Access to health care, for the thousands of people in our community who do not have a family doctor or who cannot reach their family doctor, is now possible. A shortage of family physicians is not unique to the County of Renfrew; it is a challenge facing hundreds of communities across this province. It is our goal to see RC VTAC become a permanent fixture within our local health-care sector and that will require the commitment of Ontario's Premier. Together, with our partners, we are working diligently to make that happen.

In addition, we will press forward with initiatives concerning community housing, childcare, and Ontario Works. We will continue to embrace the adoption of the Butterfly Model for Bonnechere Manor and Miramichi Lodge. As we have this entire year, we will continue to ensure that our community's most vulnerable are able to access the services and supports that they deserve and require in order to stay safe.

I want to acknowledge the sacrifices made by the residents of our Long-term Care Homes and their families this past year. There have been some trying and heartbreaking times but we have made our way through. Time lost with a loved one can never be replaced and I sincerely wish it hadn't cost so many so much.

To the families still waiting for a loved one to be admitted to a long-term care facility, I want to say that your challenges have not gone unnoticed by County Council and the Province.

Our world class Paramedic Service, renowned for its innovation, continues to creatively meet the needs of our rural community. The announcement of a Community Paramedic Program, 100 per cent funded by the Province of Ontario, is devoted to the needs of individuals on the waitlist for long-term care and will bring support, hope and compassion where it is most needed.

As Councilors we will continue to make sure our voices are heard at AMO, FCM, ROMA and EOWC to ensure that Paramedic Services remain locally managed and focused, so that they can continue to provide the best programs and services to our residents, in the manner that is best suited to their needs.

Communicating with our residents and other stakeholders on key issues has served us well in the past, and moving into this year we will continue our efforts to keep people informed. Our new Communications Strategy will provide us with a guide on how to connect with our community and each other more effectively. By examining new technology options and building on the methods we already use, I am confident that we will continue to keep our community engaged. Live streaming our meetings was not on the horizon a year ago, but has allowed a level of transparency that has benefitted us all.

We are moving into a year of transition, not only here in this building and at Renfrew County Place, but with our continued examination of our service delivery methods to find improvements and efficiencies in how we do business.

This service transition reaches out to our local municipalities as well; shared services are being examined and no doubt these new ways of delivering services will yield savings, sustainability and improvements to

the services our residents receive, not only at the County level but across local municipalities as well.

We have also committed much effort and investment into the Cell Gap Project with the Eastern Ontario Regional Network, and as a Council we will continue to move forward and ensure that we remain at the top of that list for infrastructure and increased connectivity, that will help attract new businesses, investments and residents to our County.

Recently, brave men and women representing Black, Indigenous and People of Color have begun to speak out about the racism and discrimination they and their families have endured for years. The courage it took for these individuals to publicly share their stories should not be undervalued.

I am confident Council and our community recognizes racism and discrimination are unfortunately present in our lives and our workplaces and have been for some time and wishes it wasn't so.

All of us deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, but we are hearing that this has not occurred for many of our friends and neighbors. But I believe this can change.

When we hear stories and truly listen our hearts and our minds can be opened. As municipal politicians and community influencers we are expected to lead and support our communities to do better.

In the New Year council will continue the conversation in an effort to develop a plan and begin the journey towards a more welcoming, inclusive and hopefully rejuvenated community for all residents.

There is however no quick solution. Municipal government must follow processes, but I know many members of council are committed to going down this path in order to formulate a plan of action that is transparent and meaningful on behalf of all County of Renfrew residents.

So together, as a committed, hardworking and focused Council, and with our dedicated and expert staff we will press on, continuing to build upon the excellent work that has been done by this Council and those before it.

I look forward to working with each of you this year and making sure that each of you feels listened to and valued for the contributions made in the committees you will all sit on, or lead.

I am humbled and honoured by this opportunity you have afforded me today. Let's get moving from this day forward to leading, serving and celebrating our County every day.

We are not only elected officials, but ambassadors, and as such let's keep reminding those who invest, visit or live here to 'Experience Our History and Share Our Future'.

Thank you and I wish each of you a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.