

Inaugural Address December 14th, 2021 – Warden Debbie Robinson

Good morning and thank you for being here for the first ever hybrid County Council Inaugural meeting. Together we have faced many firsts in the past two years and I would like to speak to some of them this morning.

Before I do that, I would like to express my gratitude to my Mover Councillor Michael Donohue, and my Secunder Councillor Peter Emon, for their support this past year and for my nomination as warden for a third term.

I also wish to thank all County Council members for their belief in my leadership. As we enter 2022 we will do so as a united team, comprised of the most dedicated and hard-working municipal leaders I have ever had the pleasure of knowing.

Of course, the last twenty-one months have been demanding and tested us in ways no one ever expected, but I choose to look forward with confidence.

Instead of dwelling on the challenges, let's review our successes.

Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre is still functioning and has served more than 51,000 people since its inception. That is outstanding. Our residents need this service and the province of Ontario is aware. 2022 must be the year permanent funding for VTAC is confirmed. Our residents will accept nothing less.

In 2019, we brought together the five Ontario Health Team applicants from Renfrew County. We inserted ourselves in this health-care issue because we saw the potential fracturing of our County. We convened a meeting of the proponents and we asked for collaboration. Fast forward to today, where Network 24's OHT steering

committee membership includes our CAO, our Director of Long-term Care and our Chief of Paramedic Services. Working in partnership with four of the original applicants, tremendous gains are taking place; but we are not done yet. In 2022, with the backing of the EOWC and AMO, we will continue to push the province for legislation requiring all OHT governance boards to have municipally elected representation.

After years of consultation, frustration, closed meetings, open meetings, and hundreds of back and forth emails the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing finally agreed with the County of Renfrew and our Official Plan 31 became reality. As we start to see the positive impact of the OP on growth and development across the County, the struggle to get here will have been worth the effort.

Growth will also be happening in our tourism sector. There's a lot of excitement being generated as our Algonquin Trail gets closer and closer to completion with 106 kms now open for year round enjoyment. I know this trail is destined to be the pride and joy of all our residents. All you need to do is take a walk on the trail and you'll meet smiling faces whether they are walking, cycling, ATVing or snowmobiling.

We are living in the midst of a pandemic but that has not stopped us from making huge advances in our work as an upper tier government. I recall my first warden's address following the declaration of a worldwide pandemic. I am still not sure how to describe what I was feeling. Definitely being the warden felt a little weightier. However, none of us on this council achieved our political positions by being fragile. It takes a strong constitution to be in politics and that is what makes us effective. It

also takes a team effort and I quickly realized that along with my colleagues on council, I had nine of the most steadfast, bullheaded, innovative and battle-ready warriors any leader could want in the form of our Senior Leadership Team. And today I want to talk about their accomplishments.

Major staffing changes in both our Human Resources and Planning Departments took place over a number of months, during a pandemic, while the entire office building was renovated. The outcome? A renewed Corporate Services department with young, highly educated, highly trained personnel. A revitalized planning department with staff encouraged to be creative and innovative with one common goal, to serve the unique needs of our 17 municipalities.

We also have a fully renovated, modernized administration building that is both functional and safe for our staff, visitors and council.

And while these two departments were tackling their issues, our Public Works and Community Services Departments didn't miss a beat. Just look at the incredible list of projects our public works staff achieved in 2021. It looked ambitious at the start of this year, but deliver they did. Nothing makes people happier than having a smooth road to drive on, a new bridge to travel over and culverts that keep the water flowing. It was a job well done!

The efforts of our works crew is easy to see, but when it comes to the staff from Community Services, their efforts can go unnoticed by many of us. When any disaster hits it is invariably the most vulnerable members of society who are impacted the most. People lost their jobs, others struggled with mental health and addiction, lives were turned upside down. Our Ontario Works, child care and

community housing staff are on the frontlines. They bear witness to this every single day and they help.

As of last week, our staff assisted 456 people, including families, who found themselves homeless. All but four now have a place to call home. The enormity of their situations cannot be understated, nor can the incredible positive impact our staff continue to have on the health and wellbeing of our residents.

As we move into 2022, our strategic plan will keep us focused on the priorities and actions we need to achieve for our community, leading us 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.

The provincial election will occur on June 2, 2022 and it is important that we continue to engage all parties at the Provincial and Federal levels, as we seek fiscal sustainability, support for major infrastructure projects, and assistance with municipal economic recovery.

We must also continue to maintain and grow partnerships with our 17 municipalities, Canadian Nuclear Laboratories, Garrison Petawawa, Algonquins of Pikwakanagan, EOWC, AMO, FCM, ROMA, the media, and our local stakeholders.

Canadian Nuclear Laboratories is flourishing. Its future as a critical research and development institution here in the Ottawa Valley is secure and contributing significantly to the stabilization of our local economy now and in the years to come.

It has been my absolute pleasure collaborating with Garrison Petawawa, an incredibly important asset to our County, our nation and indeed the international

community. Our Ontario Youth Winter Games will shine a spotlight on our entire County and much of that focus will be on events occurring at the Garrison. I am pleased that we have Col. John Vass here with us today.

In 2021, our Country was confronted with the ugly truth about the residential school system when the graves of 215 Indigenous children were discovered in Kamloops B.C. Since then more and more children are being found. This, more than any other event since the pandemic, will leave its mark on me.

County Council has some work to do as we endeavor to support the Indigenous people of this land and grow our relationship with the Algonquin community in Renfrew County. Our economic partnership with Pikwakanagan Chief Wendy Jocko and her council, provides us with the opportunity to improve the quality of life and economic well-being of all our communities. We must start taking deliberate steps to advance the historic Memorandum of Understanding signed by our two councils in 2016.

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 Council Communique connects us with our community and with each other more effectively. By building on the methods we already use, I am confident that we will continue to keep our community engaged. Live streaming our meetings is now the norm, and has allowed a level of transparency that has benefitted us all.

We have committed much effort and investment into the Cell Gap Project with the Eastern Ontario Regional Network, and the announcement of the awarding of the

project to Rogers earlier this year means that Cell connectivity is on its way for all residents. This will undoubtedly help attract new businesses, investments and residents to our wonderful County.

So, from this vantage point, 2022 is looking promising. We will always have challenges, but the Council of the County of Renfrew has a reputation as a strong advocate, lobbyist and tough negotiator. There is no reason to think we will be any different this coming year.

I wish to thank you for the tremendous contributions each of you made in the committees you sat on last year and I look forward to the work we will do together in 2022.

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

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