

Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome.

We gather here today on traditional land that has been inhabited by Indigenous peoples from the beginning.

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

We recognize and deeply appreciate their historic connection to this place.

Today, Prince Edward County is still home to many First Nations and Metis people, and we are grateful to have an opportunity to meet here, work and continue stewardship on this land.

On behalf of the County of Prince Edward, Members of Council, and our staff, I wish you all a very Happy New Year.

Thank you to Josh MacFarlane for piping us in.

I would like to thank our MPP, the Honourable Todd Smith, and our MP Neil Ellis, for attending today, and for continuing to be dedicated advocates for Prince Edward County and the region at Queen's Park and on Parliament Hill.

I would also like to welcome the elected officials from neighbouring municipalities as well as representatives from many community organizations and groups.

Jim Harrison, Mayor of the City of Quinte West, and his wife Jane.

Jim Alyea, Deputy Mayor, City of Quinte West, and his wife Pat.

Marg Isbester, Mayor of the Town of Greater Napanee and  
Warden for Lennox and Addington County.

Rick Phillips, Reeve of the Township of Tyendinaga and Warden  
for Hastings County.

Lt.-Col. Erik Rozema-Seaton and Chief Warrant Officer Renee  
Hansen, representing 8 Wing.

My apologies if I missed anyone.

I am appreciative of the strong working relationships and  
partnerships we have formed, and I look forward to continuing on  
this path this year.

I also want to thank the dedicated Councillors joining me up here  
today whom you met in the receiving line.

**Kate MacNaughton** - Picton

**Phil St. Jean** –Picton

**Brad Nieman** –Bloomfield/Hallowell

**Phil Prinzen** - Bloomfield/Hallowell

**Mike Harper** – Wellington

**Andreas Bolik** – Ameliasburgh

**Janice Maynard** - Ameliasburgh

**Bill Roberts** – Sophiasburgh

**Ernie Margetson** – Hillier

**Stewart Bailey** – North Marysburgh

**John Hirsch** – South Marysburgh

Thank you all for attending

When we took office in December 2018, I stressed the importance of working together as a team for the betterment of all of Prince Edward County, not just our individual wards.

That challenge has been met admirably, and I thank them for the cooperative spirit they demonstrated throughout 2019.

I would also like to introduce **Marcia Wallace**, our new Chief Administrative Officer, and acknowledge members of her leadership team and staff members in attendance.

Some of you have had a chance to meet Marcia today, but for those of you who haven't, she is also a new resident of the County, and most recently served as the Assistant Deputy Minister with the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

She assumes the position of CAO from Robert McAuley who retired in December after 11 years of service to the County.

Marcia holds a Ph.D in planning from the University of Waterloo and brings to her position a strong policy and implementation background as well as extensive knowledge of municipalities throughout Ontario.

She is an outstanding addition to the County, and we are thrilled that she – with her partner Greg - agreed to become a part of this

community and to share her experience that will help to achieve Council's goals.

Marcia leads a staff complement of 291 that is passionate about serving the residents, businesses, and visitors to Prince Edward County.

Day in and day out, our staff carry out their duties and responsibilities with tremendous effort and dedication.

As an example I'll cite **Vern Powers**, a member of our Public Works team, who this past June marked 50 years of continuous service to the community.

On behalf of council, I want to thank all our staff sincerely for all their efforts which do not go unnoticed by council or the public.

I would like to take a moment to introduce some new and some familiar faces:

**Catalina Blumenberg**, our new Clerk for the municipality who took over after Kim White retired last year after 30 years of dedicated service;

**Amanda Carter**, Director of Finance;

**Todd Davis**, Acting Director of Community Development and Strategic Initiatives;

**Pat Heffernan**, Acting Director of Operational Services;

**Lisa Lindsay**, Manager of Community Centres and Events Marketing;

## **Scott Manlow, Fire Chief**

And I would be remiss if I didn't thank my assistant, **Karen Frigault**, for the considerable work she put into organizing today's event (and me, generally!), and **Mark Kerr**, our Corporate Communications Officer who puts so much work into keeping council, staff, the media and the public well informed.

There is one other very **large group** that also deserves acknowledgement from us all and they are the volunteers in The County who put so much time and effort into the agricultural, heritage, social service, and cultural organizations that really are the lifeblood of our community. An example are the dozens of people who applied for positions on our advisory committees, many of whom now play an active role on assisting council make informed decisions.

To illustrate the importance of Advisory Committees, I would like to single out the members of our Agricultural Advisory Committee who in August organized a tour of several County farming operations for members of council. This increased our understanding and awareness of the needs and challenges faced by this dominant sector of our economy.

Many of you here today volunteer in some way or other, including Sandy Latchford and the Friends of the Museum volunteers providing today's refreshments. Thank you all so very much.

**We are nearing the end of another holiday season.**

I hope that everyone had a chance to get some much deserved rest and enjoy some quality time with loved ones over Christmas and New Year's.

2019 was a rewarding year in many ways, but it was accompanied by unexpected challenges such as the high water levels we faced, and some changes to key senior management positions.

But we have emerged **stronger, more focused and better prepared** to address not only the challenges of 2020 but also those of the decade ahead.

I, along with my fellow Mayors from Cornwall to Port Hope, continue to lobby the International Joint Commission and our federal and provincial partners to achieve water reductions in Lake Ontario in response to the extreme flooding we experienced. I would like to acknowledge **Mayor Jim Harrison's** key role in this undertaking.

With low vacancy rates and pressures on housing, construction activity remains strong in the County.

**Building permits** for new houses totalled 158, up from 153 in 2018. This represents up to \$5 million in investment in our municipality. In addition, a variety of housing projects are at various stages of development amounting to about 2,350 units.

**Tourism** remains the largest employer and fastest growing industry in Prince Edward County and is a critical part of our economy.

An estimated 750,000 visitors came to Prince Edward County in 2019.

A number of new businesses and innovative attractions also sprung up in 2019.

Of particular note is the new escape room right next door inside Macaulay House that proved popular with visitors, generating \$11,000 in profit for the County Museums and giving the public a new way to experience our County history.

The renovated **Armoury** in Picton also welcomed its new tenants this year, many of them new businesses. And the **Royal Hotel** will open its doors to the public -'soonish'!

Both of these projects utilized the talents of local businesses and tradespeople and will continue to do so in the future. We are grateful to the owners of these heritage landmarks for their considerable investments in their preservation and repurposing.

We are **ready to face 2020** as a more stable, strategic organization to deliver the quality service that County residents and businesses require.

In the next couple of weeks, we will refresh our strategic priorities and chart the path for 2020 and beyond.

With those conversations fresh in our minds, we will then move into budget deliberations during the last week of January.

Drafting a multi-million-dollar budget is never an easy task.

And I expect this year will be no different, especially given that municipalities across Ontario are being asked to do more with less in 2020 and beyond.

We are looking to find savings within our own operations in order to limit the impact on all of us as taxpayers.

Part of that process will involve reviews of our departments, our by-laws, our procedures and our policies, including those involving council.

We are also going to look for ways to be more effective and efficient with the resources we do spend. Further, we will continue to pursue additional revenue streams through the introduction of a Municipal Accommodation Tax this year, and through a gate levy at the Provincial Parks recently discussed with MPP Smith and MPP Jeff Yurek.

Council is committed to being responsible stewards of County dollars. We are looking at what can be done in the short term to respond to current challenges, but not losing sight of the longer term issues that will be important to the County's future.

Fostering a strong financial foundation and becoming more efficient and innovative will allow us to better deliver the services that matter to people and really focus on tackling the key priorities.

We need to keep working and building on our recent successes.

The reconstituted **environmental advisory committee** will be up and running within the month, which was a commitment I made

when I was campaigning in 2018, and Council made when we declared a climate emergency last year.

The committee will focus its effort on providing opportunities for community learning and awareness on issues such as climate change, pesticides, and water and energy conservation measures.

I was honoured to be invited by **Lt. Governor Elizabeth Dowdeswell** to attend a meeting in December with her and mayors from throughout Ontario to discuss environmental and climate change issues. I described to them how the committee will help Council and staff develop programs for environmental management and undertake efficient and measurable public consultation and engagement.

We have also seen movement on the affordable housing front.

The Prince Edward County Affordable Housing Corporation focuses on increasing the supply of affordable rental housing in our community through a broad range of activities.

The first directors were appointed in 2019.

These community-minded individuals have the skills, experience, connections, and lived experience required to make a real impact on this pressing issue.

And we are not dissuaded by a challenge; in fact, **we LOVE challenges!** The municipality has approached Hastings Prince Edward District School Board and asked it to consider our request

to take over the former Queen Elizabeth School property in Picton.

I believe this property should be used to address critical needs of the community such as affordable housing.

The opportunity to acquire such a large, strategic parcel of municipally serviced land in the heart of Picton does not come along very often.

We want to ensure people have a place to live in Prince Edward County, throughout their lives.

**Long-term care** is part of that housing continuum.

The provincial government announced back in June its commitment to add 76 new long-term care beds at H.J. McFarland Memorial Home and upgrade the 84 existing beds.

With this support, we will redevelop H.J. M. in the coming years to serve more people and enhance the care we can offer in a warm, welcoming, and modern environment.

Also on the health care front, the provincial government's budget made a specific commitment to working with Prince Edward County Memorial Hospital to move forward the redevelopment project.

We owe our **gratitude to Minister Todd Smith** for continuing to champion this crucial initiative.

An announcement concerning moving to stage 3 of the redevelopment process is overdue but expected at any time.

**Right now would be timely**, if Todd is so inclined!

These two projects are exciting investments in vital local infrastructure.

We realize a lot is needed to ensure Prince Edward County has safe and well maintained infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and water and wastewater facilities.

Being a strong advocate for our municipality is one of the commitments I have made to the community.

We have been directly lobbying ministries at both the provincial and federal levels for infrastructure funding, including assistance to redevelop County Road 49 and improve other vital assets.

I have taken every opportunity to advance the interests of Prince Edward County with upper levels of government and other agencies, and I will continue to do so in 2020 whether at conferences or individual meetings such as the one I had on Friday with MP Ellis about Lake Ontario water levels and our need for financial support through the federal government.

Ultimately, I am convinced that our opportunities are far greater than our challenges.

I have been a builder all my life. Building a family. Building organizations, both for profit and not for profit.

All of these endeavours relied on imagining a better future, tapping into talent, and taking measured steps to achieve our common goals.

All of the Council members up here are united by our desire to do more and get more done in the duration of our term.

**But, we can't and we won't do it alone.**

As elected officials, there are **no real 'days off.'** Whether shopping for Christmas presents on Main Street or buying groceries at No Frills or elsewhere, inevitably people will approach who want to have a chat.

And I do not mind that a bit; actually it's one of the best parts of the job.

I love talking with people and hearing of their passion and personal experiences living in Prince Edward County. I am certain members of council feel exactly the same way.

We want to continue working together with you

As we move forward together as a County, it is also important that we understand the different perspectives and challenges faced in different parts of the community.

To that end, we will be implementing **scheduled Town Hall** meetings, to be held in locations rotating around the County where I will be joined by Members of Council and members of the Leadership team.

These will be casual, relaxed affairs but we want to hear directly from you about your concerns and your ideas to make positive changes that will support County residents, businesses, and visitors.

I encourage you to get involved this year and plan to attend the meetings.

Ask yourself: how can I make this community a better place to live, work, and play to help Prince Edward County achieve its full potential?

In closing, and one year into the job, I would like to say what an **honour and privilege** it is to be the Mayor of Prince Edward County.

Much has already **been done** but there is a great deal more to do. However, I believe **the future of OUR County** is extraordinarily bright.

So, let's explore the possibilities together in 2020.

Once again, we wish you a Happy New Year.

May you and your loved ones enjoy health, happiness, and prosperity in 2020.