

# Rural Issues: An Elected Officials' Lens

Presented by **Alison Warwick** Mayor, Municipality of Thames Centre

## An Elected Officials perspective on Parks and Recreation



# Today's Session we will.....

- Explore the 'view from here' including what Council feels is important about Parks & Recreation services.
- Focus on what we are doing in our Community to support these services, and we will include some of the challenges we face financially and politically.
- Discuss the ever-present Budget Process and its effect on the Parks and Recreation Department

# SO.....

## **How can you position Parks and Recreation to be seen as essential services in your community?**

- Determine your Demographic
- Know your surroundings. What is offered in the Community next door?
- Recreation programs and services are not delivered in rural communities in the same way they are in urban centres.

# All about the Money!

- Meeting and serving Community Recreation needs and interests is a priority in our small Community. The challenge is to do so within the limits of people's time and energy, and without placing a financial burden on the community.
- It is important to understand how budgets for recreation projects and programs are developed

**SO.....**

## **How do we do that?**

- Form a Committee
- Partner with Service Clubs and Organizations
- As Council, we ask Administration to be familiar with the elements of grant applications and funding proposals for community-based projects and programs.

# Recognizing the Benefits

- Not just a soft service anymore.
- Economic Impact.
- Tourism

# It is a known fact!

- Ontario's sport and recreation infrastructure is in a state of physical decline. The vast majority of publicly owned recreation facilities were built between 1956 and 1980, and are nearing the end of their useful life.
- One of the key ingredients to creating healthy active communities are well designed, safe, functional, inviting facilities, parks and trails.
- Beyond traditional infrastructure, successful economic development also requires social and cultural infrastructure, such as libraries, parks, post offices and community centres, to improve quality of life in rural communities.
- In most communities, primary attractions are sports tournaments, festivals, parks, and major recreation facilities operated by park and recreation departments.

# More facts.....

- Good Council leadership in a Community is one with the foresight to make the right decisions that are essential to successful economic development.
- Boundary lines that traditionally divide and diminish a community and people from Council, are usually easier to cross in rural communities.
- Key partners for recreation include Service Groups and Not-for-Profit Organizations at all levels, and the private sector.
- Administration need to know that Council has an understanding of the benefits of ensuring facilitation and coordination of recreation services and fostering a high quality of life for its citizens.
- Parks and Recreation are one of the few “businesses” in a community likely to bring in “new money”.



# So here is what we are doing.....

- In 2011 Thames Centre had the foresight to add a \$13M addition to our Arena.
- In 2015 we completed construction of our “Field of Dreams” Complex with 6 Soccer Pitches and State-of-the-Art Ball Diamond.
- In 2016 we added a \$1.1M addition to one of our Libraries making it comprehensive and multifunctional.

# So here is what we are doing.....

- In 2018 construction was completed on a \$400K Fieldhouse at the Field of Dreams Complex.
- Between 2016 and 2019 Thames Centre built 5km of new looped Trail network.
- In 2018 an educational Eco-trail was introduced, complete with information stations focusing on local wildlife and plant species.

# Moving Forward

Thames Centre Council has vision and has allocated funds for its Capital Projects, which include;

- A complete Outdoor Pool Revitalization
- 5 more years of trail network expansion
- Commitment to build a \$3M Community Centre in a smaller Community within the Municipality.

# Nothing another Event won't cure...

- In Thames Centre we consolidated individual event groups into one centralized “Special Events Committee.”
- Using our natural resources and infrastructure in 2018 we added “BridgeFest” a local vendor and artist Festival to our Community utilizing our Pedestrian Bridge.
- Combined Municipal events with local Service Clubs events to add value and draw larger overall attendance.

# The Challenges

- Within Thames Centre, we have many Communities, each with their own identity, each of these having various types of social infrastructure, this can be challenge
- Some Communities have arenas, outdoor pools, tennis courts, indoor tracks etc. While others have, splash pads, ball diamonds, soccer fields, parks, walking trails to name a few. Others Communities have less. It can create animosity.
- Not every municipality “has it all” nor do they need to. As a region, we have a great deal of activities to offer because of the recreational infrastructure we have in place and the plans to develop additional infrastructure to meet the needs of the population, interests of individuals, groups and the demographics of our area.

# We as Council Recognize.....

**Community Recreation Facilities, Parks and Trails act as community connectors and contribute largely to community development.**

- They are a place used for; community celebrations.
- A place for Service Clubs to meet and volunteer activities to take place.
- To house public community meetings.
- To celebrate our local history,
- To refuge in the event of community tragedy and place that ultimately provides residents with a better quality of life.

# In Summary

Recreation fosters many positive outcomes particularly in rural Communities. But perhaps the greatest benefit lies in its potential to bring communities together. It is a stepping stone encouraging people to get to know each other and to participate in activities together.

Recreation assists us in building trusting and respectful relationships in our Communities. When residents trust and respect each other, they get better at tackling some of the bigger issues facing our Communities today.

You, as Recreation leaders need to understand and promote the power of Recreation to your respective Council, help us to build community, provide opportunities for positive engagement, strengthen and foster positive personal, social, environmental and economic benefits.

# Questions?

