



WARDEN JO-ANNE ALBERT'S

INAUGURAL REMARKS

DECEMBER 2, 2010

Good Morning Members of Council, Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Welcome to our 161<sup>th</sup> Inaugural session of Hastings  
County Council.

As I did last year I want to thank His Honour Judge Scott for once again helping us make this inaugural session so special. We continue to be fortunate to have distinguished members of the Bench assist us in the official proceedings of these inaugural sessions. Your ongoing commitment to the administration of justice in our County is very much appreciated by all of us in this chamber.

I want to acknowledge and thank the members of County Council for affording me your confidence as I take on the duties as Warden for a second consecutive year. Your support is very much appreciated.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the members of

my council and my staff in Tweed who last year helped me each and every day. I know that I will continue to need their understanding and their assistance again this coming year.

I also want to acknowledge at this point, what previous Wardens have highlighted; and that is the importance of a strong and positive relationship with our major partners namely the Cities of Quinte West and Belleville and the County of Prince Edward. As I noted last year, while we may disagree on a few issues from time to time I believe our partnership is a model for other parts of the Province.

In thinking ahead to 2011 I am very excited by what I believe will be an incredibly interesting and important period. There will be a provincial election and perhaps a federal one as well. These events will provide both an opportunity and a challenge for us here in Hastings and indeed across the municipal sector.

On the opportunity side we should be working with our local M.P. and M.P.P. to talk about issues that are important to our citizens and property taxpayers.

Of particular note are the economic development fund programs that both the federal and provincial governments have created that have greatly assisted our local businesses across the county. These programs have invested directly in growing our local economy but they are both coming to the end of their original mandated terms.

Ontario's Eastern Ontario Development Fund set aside \$80 million over the past four years for our region. This was the brainchild of the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus and the EOWC is working hard to get the Province to continue on with this critically essential program. Likewise we need to encourage our M.P. Daryl Kramp to press his federal colleagues to continue with their Eastern Ontario Development Program. Since it came into being the EODP has invested more than \$60 million in over 4,000 separate projects which has in turn

been leveraged by a further \$300 million for Eastern Ontario.

Ladies and Gentleman these are the kinds of programs that Hastings County has to take a strong stand on and work hard to advocate for. We dare not sit back and simply hope that the good work that both have done to date will be enough. We must raise our voice in support of the efforts that our MPP and MP are making on our behalf with their colleagues in Toronto and Ottawa for both the critically important economic development funds.

And just last week we heard about and supported the efforts of the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry along with EOWC to end the unfair burden that the Province's Farm Tax and Managed Forest rebates programs are placing on our municipalities fiscal shoulders. This was just the opening salvo and I know that there will be long hours of discussion and encouragement needed by SD&G, the EOWC and AMO

on this file. I believe we need to stand shoulder to shoulder with our colleagues because quite frankly it is in our financial interests to rectify this unfair burden. For some of our members, Stirling-Rawdon and Madoc Township this burden translates into an additional, annual, property tax burden of 12%! Across the County the average is 4%. Much could be done with those funds or find their way into relieving some of the property tax burden directly.

I intend to work with our staff and our partners to press the case in Toronto on this matter. I hope you will do the same from your position as the heads of council of your municipalities.

Let me now turn to some other issues. But before I get to specifics I want to tell you how excited I am as Warden to begin work on implementing our new County Strategic Plan. Our Plan is homegrown. It is a down to earth, easy

to read and more importantly easy to understand guide to who we are and what we do as a County organization. Simply put and as the Plan states “our job is to support people and communities.”

We will do that in many ways from ensuring an ambulance gets to someone’s door as quickly as possible and with a highly trained team of paramedics to putting residents first in Hastings and Centennial Manors. We will give individuals and families who need our temporary assistance a hand-up and we will do that in ways that preserve their dignity and respects their personal situations. We will do all that we can to ensure that our affordable housing units are safe and clean. And we will continue to push both senior level governments to invest in more units because the wait list is simply too long here in the County.

Earlier this week the Province released its long-awaited

master plan to deal with the affordable housing crisis in Ontario. I have asked our CAO, working with our Social Services Director, his staff and our County Treasurer to undertake a thorough review of the Province's proposals to understand their potential affect on our operations and to report back through the Joint Social Services Committee in the next few months. As a provider and funder of more than 2,500 affordable housing units across the County we need to pay close attention to the Province's directions.

We are of course extremely pleased to be completing our new seniors housing units in Belleville and Quinte West along with those that will soon come on stream in Marmora, Deseronto, Coe Hill and Bancroft. These will be welcome additions to our stock but clearly with a waiting list of some 1527 more needs to be done.

Speaking of more...I believe we need to continue to take up the call of former County Councillor Tom Deline to press the powers at the LHIN and in Toronto to consider adding new Long Term Care beds to our County. There are far too many of our citizens waiting for a bed in one of the long term care facilities both private and public. We started the process of working with the LHIN on this essential matter and I hope that in the near future they will provide us with a clearer picture of where they intend to show leadership on this issue. Important matters like this take time to resolve but we are here for the long-term.

I said earlier that we want to continue to provide people who need temporary assistance a helping hand when they need it. And one of the most important ways we can support individuals and families is by working with them to find employment.

I believe that we need to continue the efforts our staff are making day in and day out with our “Employment Connections” program. Since we first created the program just a few short years ago in 2007 our staff has helped 8,249 people find a job! That is an average of 2,062 per year! Those jobs have been spread across the County so that people in all parts of Hastings are getting back to work.

In our offices in Belleville we helped 4,456 people find work. In Quinte West it is 2,053. In North Hastings 882 and in Center Hastings 858 people found meaningful employment.

Changes are coming across Ontario regarding employment programs and we will be ready to adapt and to ensure that we continue to help find work. As our former Director of Social Services Eric Fry used to say, “...the best form of social assistance is a job”. I could not

agree more and I urge Steve and his staff to keep up the incredible success story that “Employment Connections” represents.

As I said in my inaugural speech last year promoting Hastings County as a strong and vibrant community to invest in is one of the most important activities that we as elected officials can get involved in. When businesses prosper our citizens and communities also prosper. Our job, in part, is to try and put the necessary infrastructure in place so that businesses can thrive. While local municipalities manage our roads, bridges, water and wastewater services, the County is going to continue to be a leading partner in the EOWC’s regional high-speed broadband network. Last winter 84% of our local businesses surveyed told us that access to high-speed internet services was vital to their continued growth and expansion.

This essential business tool is coming to our County through the Eastern Ontario Regional broadband Network or EORN. Hastings is going to end up with a broadband “super highway” running the length of the County. This means businesses and citizens will have access to ultra high speeds and capacities that do not exist anywhere in Eastern Ontario and at prices that will be affordable.

Ladies and gentleman I cannot over emphasize the importance of this project as one of the keys to our collective future. I am pleased to say that the project is now under construction. Our CAO Jim Pine continues to be the Project Co-Lead and keeps our interests front and center. With a project that is going to cover an area the size of Nova Scotia and bigger than 109 countries it is truly a major project. By the time it is completed it will have a value of more than \$250 million. We wish the EORN team all the best as they get the job done.

Economic growth and development in the County will continue to be led by Brian McComb our Director of Planning and Development along with Andrew Redden our Economic Development Manager. Brian and his staff have been working very hard to complete our new County Official Plan and I am hopeful that this will be the year we will see the full first draft of the new Plan.

Andrew will also be busy promoting the County to investors both local and beyond our County boundary.

More than 50 new businesses opened across the County this year and we plan to see this trend continue.

Implementing the recommendations of the Premier Ranked Destinations Tourism plan will be a priority as will his continued work with our Enterprise Facilitator, Darcelle Runciman. Darcelle has been very busy meeting directly with small business owners and helping them with their startup or expansion plans. Darcelle's work is being very well received in the community and we want to continue her good work.

At our last County Council meeting we received a very informative presentation from the new QHC President and CEO, Ms. Mary Claire Egberts regarding the long off load delays that are currently plaguing our ambulance system. I for one was encouraged by her commitment to fix the problem within the next three months. She clearly got it...we need our ambulances ready to respond to emergencies in our communities, not stuck idling at Belleville General Hospital because they either do not have the staff or the space to take our patients out of the ambulances.

As our EMS Director Doug Socha has pointed out this situation cannot continue without a major injection of new property taxpayer money. He like the rest of us has no desire to go to the taxpayer because of these off load delays. We will be very vigilant monitoring the changes that Mary Claire promised would be implemented at QHC.

Let me end with a nod to the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus and their continued work on our behalf. Hastings County has been a strong and vital player with the Caucus for at least the past decade. I continue to be firmly committed to the work of the EOWC. I have learned a great deal from my EOWC colleagues and I look forward along with our CAO to helping whenever and wherever we can. Recently the Caucus tallied up the work that they have done in the past few years and put a value to it. The changes they advocated and the programs they convinced the senior governments to establish have a staggering value of more than \$1.2 billion, yes billion, dollars. All of which has in numerous ways made a huge difference to our property taxpayers and our local municipalities. This is why Hastings County has to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Caucus even when it means challenging our senior government partners to do better. We have never shied away from thoughtful debate and I know as a Council the EOWC can continue to count on our support in the coming year.

Finally, as we look at the year ahead I think it is important to recognize the financial challenges that we as the County and our member municipalities will likely be facing. We also have to be mindful of the Province's current fiscal situation and the effect it may have on us.

It is in this climate that we will find ourselves as we undertake the negotiation of five of our six collective agreements this year. These negotiations will fall largely on our staff in Human Resources and the line departments and we wish them well.

Let me say once again, thank you Council for your support and encouragement to continue in the Warden's role this year. I look forward to serving you in the days and months ahead.

Thank you.