



Selwyn (Buck) Hicks 2022 Warden's Closing Remarks Thursday, November 10th, 2022

On December 4th, 2018 – exactly three years, eleven months & six days ago – the members around this horseshoe were sworn in to office by her Honour – Justice Morneau. Little did we know that one year later we would be faced with an unprecedented health care challenge that would rock the world. In my 2022 inaugural address, I told you that I wanted us to be remembered, not for what we faced, but for our relentless commitment to achieve results for the people of Grey County in spite of it. That said, I would like to take a moment to reflect on some of our accomplishments over the last year.

In Long Term Care, thanks to the redevelopment committee, we made great strides with the Rockwood Redevelopment Project. This included a decision by Council to include assisted living beds in the build. Staff continue to manage outbreaks while protecting residents. We celebrated the opening of the new Nursing Wing at Georgian College which will pump, much needed, home-grown nurses into our health care system. You will recall that Grey County contributed \$1 million to this important initiative to reinforce our long-standing partnership with Georgian College as well as our commitment to addressing the nursing shortage in a meaningful way. We continue to look for ways to support our Long Term Care Staff including vacation & well-being initiatives.

In Planning, we kicked off the OPA 11 process with public meetings in February.

Council also approved the Age-Friendly Community Strategy and Action Plan.

Turning next to Climate Action - Grey County approved its first ever climate change action plan: Going Green in Grey. That, my friends, is cause for applause. Credit goes to our Climate Change Task Force and our Deputy Warden for suggesting creation of that Task Force. We joined the Clean Air Partnership and began planting trees toward our commitment of 1 million trees by 2030. We adopted a Green Fleet Strategy with recommendations for preparing for battery electric vehicle implementation over the next 15 years. Lastly, we commenced naturalization of the Grey County Administration Office property as a positive step forward towards our tree planting goals of Going Green in Grey. It was so much fun to attend that event where young and old worked together to plant trees. My daughter Chloe has claimed several trees that she helped plant as “hers”.

In my 2022 inaugural speech, I called for action on Mental Health & Addictions. Thanks to you, a Mental Health and Addictions Task Force was formed in February of 2022.

The Task Force received a number of community delegations from organizations such as: CMHA, Keystone Youth and Family Services, the Grey/Bruce Poverty Task Force, the Community Drug and Alcohol Strategy, our Public Health Unit & the Bluewater and Catholic District School Boards. I learned a lot from this committee. I want to thank the members of the task force – especially the Chair, Councilor O’Leary who pushed us to find tangible ways to move the dial on Mental Health & Addictions. I am confident that great things will come from the final report of this Task Force.

Turning to COVID-19. Our Emergency Declaration was terminated on March 14, 2022 – just a few days shy of the 2-year anniversary of the declaration.

Turning next to Paramedic Services – our paramedics were heavily involved in the Supportive Outreach Services project - bringing care to the most at-risk individuals in our community. We also completed a 10-year service deployment review.

In Economic Development, we co-hosted and organized three regional job fairs throughout the area. We also developed a Foreign Direct Investment strategy. Our Summer Company program for young entrepreneurs and the Starter Company and Digital Main Street program for small businesses were provided through the BEC. We saw a return of the Ag 4.0 technology and agriculture conference. We also saw enhanced Grey Transit Route (GTR) service levels and experienced exceptional increase in ridership (240% increase). Lastly, the Grey Bruce Local Immigration Partnership (GBLIP) celebrated Welcome Week and other community events.

Next, highlighting our transportation department, think back to late February, 2022. Specifically, the Family Day Weekend where our transportation team was operating through a significant multi-day storm that saw heavy accumulation and several prolonged road closures. We completed seven resurfacing projects on Grey Roads: 2, 31, 13, 15, 10, 8, & 9.

In other areas, we developed a four-year corporate communication strategy to grow and improve Grey County's internal and external communications efforts through to 2026. Grey Roots saw a return to general events and exhibits. Council elected to enhanced 35.5km of CP Rail Trail - improving the surface and making it more enjoyable and

accessible to various trail users in southern Grey County. We also approved the updated asset management plan to ensure our \$1.6 Billion in assets are well managed.

Turning now to Social Services and Housing. Our Grey County team supported the evacuation of residents following the fire at a rooming house in Hanover. Grey County moved Emergency Shelter services in-house for enhanced efficiency. We implemented the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care program. Lastly, we purchased a property on 14th Street in Owen Sound for the creation of Supportive Housing. Renovations are underway.

So, there you have it. Let there be no doubt that Grey County is making headway on multiple projects that go directly to improving the quality of life for our residents. I want to thank our Senior Management Team. I said it last year and I'll say it again this year. You showed incredible resilience and grit in the face of adversity. I thank you and this Council thanks you for your leadership, professionalism and commitment to people. A special thank you goes out to our past clerk Heather and our current clerk Tara. Folks, how often have you seen me consulting our clerks. They're the best. They research and prepare for every possibility at council meetings and no matter how much you tested them, and you did, they always came up with the right answer.

I want to acknowledge my speech writers Katrina, Philly and Rob. They always delivered under the tightest of deadlines. Thank you. I think they will appreciate me mentioning that while the speeches were their words, the horrible dad jokes were all mine.

During my three terms as Warden, I was assisted by two amazing women – Penny and Kayla. Just imagine the challenge of trying to coordinate the schedule of a working lawyer (whose schedule you don't get to fully know because of client confidentiality) along with a Warden's schedule. Penny and Kayla had to work with my law office staff to keep me on track. It didn't always work, but, it was never their fault. True story – Kayla was making phone calls on my behalf from her hospital bed on the day of the delivery of her last child. Talk about commitment to your job!! Penny never once said no, or, I can't do that. Instead, she frequently said: *"let me take care of that for you"*.

And then there are the individuals who do little things that make a big difference. People like Olivia with her words of encouragement. Sharon who has no problem cutting me up. Kath with her smile and a joke or two. And, Monica who would smile and say bling, bling each time I walked past her desk wearing my chain of office.

I want to thank our CAO, Kim Wingrove. It is no exaggeration to say that Kim is one of the very best CAO's in the province. She is a leader in her field who is respected by her peers. She is a leader who mentors and lifts others. She is smart, strategic and capable of carrying a very heavy load. Most of all, she is compassionate – always looking out for others. Kim, it was an absolute pleasure working with you. I learned from you and Grey County is very lucky to have you for as long as we can convince you to stay. Thank you.

I want to give a shout-out to retired MPP Bill Walker, who set aside political difference to do the work with Warden Jackson and I that was necessary during the pandemic.

Thanks also goes to our MP Alex Ruff who made time to meet with me each quarter and allowed me to control that agenda. Our new MPP, Rick Byers tells me that, as a

new MPP, he feels like he is drinking from a fire hose. Rick has been humble and inquisitive. I think those qualities will serve him well in his new role.

I want to thank our Medical Officer of Health – Dr. Arra. I should refer to him as Professor Arra because he taught me so much. I will never forget the conversations we had at all hours of the day and night during the pandemic. Funny thing – I thought I was special (having had those countless conversations with Dr. Arra) until I found out that many others had the same experience with Dr. Arra during the pandemic. Thank you Dr. Arra.

County Council, I want to thank you. I can go around this horseshoe and confidently point to each and every one of you and say that you care. Of course, we have political, ideological and perhaps philosophical differences. However, what binds us is a profound sense of duty, service and desire to make a difference. County Council – over the last four years, you have indeed made a difference. Our community is a better place because of you. Thank you.

I want to single out one member around this horseshoe. My Mayor, her worship, Sue Paterson. Sue – you made it possible for me to serve as Warden by lightening my load at the lower tier. During our first term on County Council we often drove to meetings together – sometimes in nasty weather. I enjoyed our conversations that covered a multitude of subjects. We became good friends and you were someone I could go to for support, ideas or just as a sounding board. I'm going to miss working with you Sue but I know that we'll continue to be friends. Thank you Sue.

I've saved the most important person for last. My best friend and wife, Barbara. Being the spouse or partner of an elected representative can be challenging. It's hard to read a social media post or email slamming someone you love. It's hard to have your business partner off doing other things while you pick up the slack. Barb I know that there were times when you could tell that my head was in a different place during family time. You supported me. You lifted me. You loved me. And, you allowed me to go on this crazy journey of political life for sixteen years. I love you.

I'd like to conclude by saying what an absolute privilege and honour it was to serve as your Warden. It's an experience I will never forget. You elected the County's first visible minority Warden in her 170-year history. We had challenging times. There were many difficult and close decisions. There were a few occasions when I had to call and offer some, let's say, gentle Warden's counsel. You were always respectful, understanding and professional. I thank you for that. You answered my call each and every time I put a challenge to you. Thank you.

I want to finish with a line I used in my very first speech to you on December 4th, 2018. It's from the Canadian rock band - Rush. *"And the men who hold high places. Must be the ones who start. To mold a new reality. Closer to the heart."*

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

