

Mayor's Report Tuesday, Nov. 14

Part 1

Hospital working group

I will open my regular Mayor's Report to talk about something that's on everyone's mind – the closing of the Urgent Care Centre in 2028.

I know people are worried -- and afraid -- about the closure of the UCC at the Port Colborne Hospital site.

And while we don't have a lot of answers about the future of health care in Port Colborne today, you should have no doubt people who care about this community and about its people are determined to find those answers and fight for them to become reality.

Our health services are under the control of the provincial Ministry of Health and its creation, the Niagara Health System.

But health is the business of everyone, and this municipal council recognizes that Port Colborne needs to be part of every decision that affects the health services for our people.

As you all know, Niagara Health announced seven months ago it will close the Urgent Care Centre five years from now.

You are also aware, I hope, that if you face a health emergency – a heart attack, a stroke, a car accident – you call 911, or you go to the emergency department. That has not changed. It's been that way for years.

As I said in May, and over the summer, my office organized a working group of Port Colborne citizens to gather information from experts so we can provide accurate information and be better-informed about making logical, realistic decisions with regards to health care in our city.

The working group has been instructed to advise this council and our community about the best, most effective way to move forward without the Urgent Care Centre.

What we need to do, what we hope to do, is to improve access to **primary** care, so we keep you out of the hospital in the first place!

The members of the working group represent different parts of our community – seniors, labour, business, clergy, and front-line health care.

The chair of our group is **Donna Birrell Westlake**, who was director of nursing at Port Colborne Hospital and Health Program Director at Welland Hospital. She has more than 40 years of nursing experience working in management and administration.

Members of the group include:

Taralea McLean, the executive director of Bridges Community Health Centre.

In Port Colborne and Fort Erie, Taralea leads teams of physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, dietitians, diabetes educators, social workers, health promoters, community health workers, physiotherapists, kinesiologist, a mental health team and other professionals in community health services.

Tracey Dewar, Director of Portal Village Retirement Home, has worked 25 years with seniors and their families.

Kevin Langerak, General Manager of Oskam Steel, one of our city's largest employers.

Pastor Brian Lofthouse, retired, is well-known for his dedication to our community. He represents church leaders in our city. Pastor Brian served as hospital chaplain many years, and he continues to be chaplain of our fire department.

Brent Leclair worked in maintenance and infrastructure at Port Colborne General almost all his career and represented union members for decades. If anyone knows how the hospital works, inside and out, it's Brent.

And of course, we have a doctor in our group, **Dr. Jeff Remington**, who runs the Niagara South Family Medicine Team. Dr. Remington's team includes five doctors, and a physician assistant who serve patients in Port Colborne and Ridgeway.

Dr. Remington also works shifts in the Emergency Room of Haldimand War Memorial Hospital in Dunnville.

He brings many years of success in recruiting physicians to Niagara.

All the members of our group have a vested interest in the health of our community, and all of you.

They understand your worries and your fears.

They have families, too, with children and grandchildren, and aging parents.

They know many of you don't have a doctor.

We're working on that, too.

The shortage of doctors is a critical issue for us. As it is in communities across Canada.

Any of us could open a walk-in clinic tomorrow to help with minor emergencies, but where do we find the doctors and nurses to work there?

Physician recruitment is at the top of our list. Along with recruiting doctors to our city, we need more physician assistants, nurses, and nurse practitioners. The competition is fierce. There are many reasons for these shortages, and we are working on all levels to address these issues.

Jill Croteau is the full-time recruiter for the Region of Niagara. She is a tremendous asset to our team. She has attended our meetings to explain the challenges and successes of convincing doctors to come to Niagara.

You've all heard and read about the challenges. This is not news. The issue of the closure of the UCC isn't only about a shortage of doctors and nurses and health care staff. It's about improving primary health care in our city.

I want you all to know our working group is doing exactly that: **working**.

We have met seven times since May. Each time we meet, we learn more about how things are working (and not working), and how we can improve them. We are consulting with doctors, nurses, hospital administrators. They are all working with us, helping us to navigate the choppy waters of delivering primary care. We believe the number of ER visits, wait times, and hospital admissions can be decreased with a model of comprehensive primary health care.

We've recently done a survey with our local doctors to find out what they think will improve our position in primary health care.

In the new year, we'll send a survey to you, the citizens of Port Colborne. Many of you have ideas – we hope you'll share them with us. We're in this together. Let's work it out together.

But before any of us can make logical decisions, we need to have all the information, and all the options and opportunities available to us.

I know many of us feel passionate about our health care system. And I share the sense of loss many are feeling at the idea of the closing of the hospital on Sugarloaf. Children were born there, lives were saved, and sadly, lives ended within its walls. It has been an important part of our community's history. Today, however, we are faced with the challenge of building a workable health care system for today and the future.

Outbursts, demands, protests and petitions may make us feel better momentarily, but they are not going to change the course of what we're all facing in our future.

Our working group has worked hard to stay neutral.

From the beginning, we agreed our group would not be political. We will not say or do things to pander or posture to your worries and fears. The working group will not be swayed or persuaded by any political affiliation.

We rely on facts.

Once we have all the facts, and have developed a course of action, that's when we go to the province to make our case. That's when we turn to the Minister of Health to work with us to deliver the best primary care possible.

We are sensitive to the worries and fears of our community.

We want what you want.

And we want you to know we will find a solution that works for the people of Port Colborne.

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Part 2

REMEMBRANCE DAY

It was good to see several hundred people at the Cenotaph in HH Knoll Park Saturday to mark Remembrance Day.

Thank you to Royal Canadian Legion Branch 56 President Harry Hamilton and Poppy Chair Carol Madden for coordinating the annual ceremony.

My office received quite a few messages from people who were not able to attend in person -- they were so thankful they could watch the live-stream from home.

Thank you, Councillors Aquilina and Bodner for representing council at the Township of Humberstone memorial in Centennial Park at Cedar Bay.

I understand more than 100 people joined you there. It's great to see the tradition continue, often now with grandparents taking their grandchildren to ceremonies on November 11, to remember those who died in battle for our freedoms.

CANAL LANDS TRANSFER MEANS JOBS

MP Vance Badawey, Parliamentary Assistant to Canada's Minister of Transport, was in town on the first Saturday of November with me and Thorold Mayor Terry Ugolini and **Hamilton-Oshawa Port Authority** president and CEO Ian Hamilton.

They were here to announce the transfer of 40 acres of Transport Canada land on the southeast side of the Welland Canal to HOPA.

Two parcels of land in Thorold, one of 12 acres and the other 16 acres, were transferred a few weeks before.

You know what this means, right? Jobs jobs jobs!

Now that our partner, the Port Authority, has the land, it paves the way for opportunities in business, education, environment and ecology.

All those things mean JOBS, including cargo handling and storage, and improved multimodal service for shippers. Our Lake Erie access makes it viable for bulk, breakbulk and containerized cargo.

HOPA is also working with community partners on a Great Lakes multi-use centre for a portion of the Port Colborne lands, building on Niagara's maritime heritage and the leadership of its education sector.

Preliminary discussions have been held with organizations including the Seafarers International Union, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, and post-secondary institutions.

Those groups will become either tenants or users of the new Great Lakes Innovation Centre.

This is exactly the kind of cooperation and collaboration we've been talking about at this council since our inaugural meeting almost one year ago.

Nice when a year's work finally comes together, on so many levels.

RAISE THE FLAG FOR ACTIVISM AGAINST VIOLENCE

Please join us next Friday morning, Nov. 24, when we raise the flag to launch 16 days of activism against gender-based violence.

Gwen Alves from the Canadian Federation of University Women, and Amanda Braet of Birchway Niagara will be here to proclaim the campaign underway and bring awareness to the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

The campaign opens Nov. 25, the date the Mirabel sisters from the Dominican Republic were violently assassinated in 1960.

It ends 16 days later on Dec. 10, International Human Rights Day.

In Canada, we also observe **National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women**, to remember the women who were murdered at Polytechnique in Montreal on Dec. 6, 1989.

In Niagara, we were shocked and saddened to learn of the violent deaths of two women in the past few weeks, one killed by her husband, another killed by a so-called boyfriend.

The white and purple flag will remind us that it happens everywhere, in large cities and small communities like ours.

The cupola on top of city hall will be lit purple during the campaign.

It's dark by 5pm now.

Next time you drive along Clarence Street downtown, look over at the roof of city hall, and be mindful why the cupola is purple – for **16 days of activism against gender-based violence**.

Share that with your friends, family, and neighbours – there are many ways to take action, at home and at work. We all need to learn the signs, and how to help stop the violence.

Join us Friday morning, Nov. 24 at 10am. Right here at city hall.

Thank you for your attention.

Now back to our agenda this evening.