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WHERE THE COMMUNITY MEETS

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Express-O-Gram Local Elections: Jack's back as Aylmer mayor

NOW COMES THE REAL WORK
The people have spoken – well about 20 to 30 percent of the electorate – and we now have a mix of old and new directors to move Ontario municipalities into the future.

In Central Elgin, there is an entirely new council led by Mayor Andrew Sloan. Those neophytes have a full plate with the rapid expansion of Port Stanley, the special needs of Belmont and Sparta and the swallowing of treasured farmland by in-demand housing. That will make an interesting balancing act.

In Bayham, Mayor Ed Ketchabaw was confidently returned to leadership with a mix of old and new council members. That municipality also will have to balance rural and urban wants and needs with at-risk neighbourhoods under relentless pressure of housing developments. At some point the crushing debt of that submarine hidden in Port Burwell will become unavoidable.

In Malahide, Dominique Giguère advanced to the mayor's chair and Mark Widner became deputy-mayor unopposed. Three-out-of-five council seats were taken by incumbents, joined by two new members (one acclaimed). It would suggest constituents are largely happy with their representation.

Attention will be commanded by Springfield services and the need for more business-zoned land. Those issues will join the continuing battle to control spending at the East Elgin Community Complex, which it shares with Aylmer.

In Aylmer, we're glad to see Jack Couckuyt back at the helm and recognize him for his efforts to see debt brought under control in his previous term. He joins Deputy Mayor Pete Barbour, a veteran councillor, who handily shrugged off a couple of challengers and they head a mixed slate of acclaimed councillors – three new, two returning.

Mr. Couckuyt has shown interest in improving

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by Rob Perry of The Aylmer Express
Jack Couckuyt was elected as mayor of Aylmer on Monday, October 24, and Pete Barbour as deputy mayor as they each topped the polls in three-way races.

Mayor-elect Couckuyt, in an interview immediately after results were announced Monday night, said, "I'm very humbled in terms of the number of votes. I know it wasn't 50%."

Asked about what his priorities would be, he said, "I think one of the areas when I knocked on doors, and I counted 1,400 and some doors and spoke to about 600 people, and a great number of those were insisting that something happen with the (East Elgin Community) Complex.

"That's a very tough thing to do."

Aylmer was tied into a partnership agreement with

Malahide Township on running the Complex, but residents told him they wanted to see more services and recreation options offered there, such as an indoor pool, an indoor running track or a seniors centre.

"I think we could do it," he added. The twin-pad arena was very expensive to operate for local taxpayers, but he believed they might be willing to bear a slightly higher burden "if there was something there for everyone."

The partnership agreement with Malahide would expire in 2027. "We're going to have to do something with the Complex anyway."

"The beginning conversation is going to have to be with Malahide."

He'd also heard from about half the 12 business owners he had spoken to that town hall had "too much red tape."

Some had even moved their

head office to Tillsonburg to get away from that, he stated. "We have to be more welcoming at town hall."

He welcomed the election of Mr. Barbour as the deputy mayor. "Pete and I work very

well together."

Mr. Couckuyt, who was previously mayor from 2010 to 2014, received 712 votes or 41.9 percent, Ted McDonald, a former councillor, 539 (31.7%) and Tom Charlton, currently a

councillor, 450 (26.4%).

Mr. Barbour, a long-time and current councillor, received 1,181 votes in his race (71%), versus Fred Buro with 301 votes (18.1%) and Isaak Neufeld with 177 votes (10.7%).

Voter turnout in Aylmer for this election was (31.4%), compared to 29.5% in 2018.

See election results for Aylmer, Malahide, Bayham, Central Elgin, and school trustees inside.



Colonel Talbot Branch 81, Royal Canadian Legion, members Al Ferris, left, and Rick Shirran, right, pinned a poppy on the lapel of President Kevin Holborn, middle, under the eyes of the Aylmer Cenotaph on Tuesday, Oct. 25. Poppy sales begin this

Friday and run through Remembrance Day, through Legion members and local stores. Proceeds go to support veterans and Legion youth education programs. (AE/Rob Perry)

"Just too big" – Malahide rejects apartment rezoning

by Rob Perry of The Aylmer Express
Malahide councillors, after a public hearing Thursday, Oct. 20, denied rezoning requested by Leverton Developments Inc. for a proposed six-unit apartment building at 51403 Ron McNeil Line in Springfield.

The developer had originally

requested changes to the property zoning (which already would allow an apartment building) for the new structure to be taller than allowed, for the front to be just one metre from the Ron McNeil road allowance, and for slightly more coverage of the lot for parking than allowed.

After protests from neighbours at a previously public meeting, the developer dropped the height request, but still asked for the other changes.

The use of an unopened municipal lane on the east side of 51403 Ron McNeil Line was also part of the plan, but not directly related to the rezoning request.

Planner Matt Campbell of Zelinka Priamo, acting on behalf of the developer, said the rezoning changes being requested were really about where the apartment building could be located on the site, not the building itself (which conformed to zoning at the lower height).

The one-metre setback from

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\$8-million Sante expansion gets \$500,000 from province

by Rob Perry of The Aylmer Express
Ontario Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade Minister Vic Fedeli was in Aylmer late Tuesday, Oct. 18 afternoon to announce \$500,000 in funding for an expansion of production capacity at Sante Manufacturing Inc., a soap and bath product producer, in the Elgin Innovation Centre.

The company, which opened its plant here last year, currently

has 75 employees, and hopes to be over 100 when a new production line was completed.

Wayne and Sharon Kirby of Mississauga are the owners of Sante Manufacturing, which they started in 2006.

About 70% of their products were sold in the U.S.A, mostly in value stores, they said, something they were proud of.

Originally, they'd used third-party suppliers to make and package their products, but

that fell apart when COVID-19 struck.

"We couldn't be held hostage" to supply and labour shortages, Ms. Kirby said, so they decided to start making their own products, something they wouldn't have done if not for the pandemic.

Mr. Kirby said about Aylmer, "We find this a good place to be."

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Aylmer PSB members support, but wary of, schoolbus cameras

by Rob Perry of The Aylmer Express
Aylmer Police Services Board members endorsed "in principle" a proposal to have cameras installed on schoolbuses to record when drivers passed them despite having their flashers going while loading or unloading children.

But the Aylmer PSB members were also concerned by who would pay for all those cameras.

The proposal came from the East Ferris PSB, and was discussed at a board meeting Tuesday, Oct. 18. The letter said, despite new enhanced warning

lights and signage on the back of buses, drivers were still passing when they should be stopped.

East Ferris was convinced the next measure would be to put cameras on "stop arms" that deploy from the side of a bus, and was asking the province to consider this means of enforcement. It also noted that almost a million children rode a school bus every day in Ontario.

Aylmer Councillor Pete Barbour, a board member and a schoolbus driver, said statistics only revealed the number of such incidents that were reported to authorities, not all of them.

He expected that out of every 100 school buses in a given day, one motorist would blow through the flashing red lights at the front and back of a bus.

"Since September, I've had three," he said. "It happens all the time. You just can't get a plate (number); they're going too fast."

Anything that could within reason be done should be, he added.

Aylmer Police Chief Zvonko Horvat called the East Ferris proposal "a pretty aggressive process, including cameras on every bus in Ontario."

From a policing perspective,

the cost of cameras, and who would pay for them, would have to be considered.

Board member Bill Unger agreed. "It is pretty aggressive," and someone would have to pay to equip 30,000 school buses across Ontario.

Cr. Barbour agree the cost would be extremely expensive, "But the concept is good."

He suggested supporting the East Ferris call in principle, adding nothing would happen until the Ontario government "kicks in a lot of money."

Mr. Ungar and Aylmer Deputy Mayor Sheri Andrews, board chairman, agreed.



Clovermead Adventure Farm in Malahide Township north of Aylmer has been celebrating its annual "Pumpkin Fest" every Saturday in October, with one more coming up on the 29th. A highlight of the celebration is a "Pumpkin Gun" show featuring air cannons. At left, show co-host Travis Chambers fired a load of rotting pumpkins from the "Boomer" cannon (not at spectators!), one of seven used at the farm. Right, a crowd watched the 2 p.m. show Saturday, Oct. 22. Chris Hiemstra, said that attendance at the farm that day was over 1,000, and while that wasn't a record, "what stood out was how long they stayed. Our parking nearly ran out, with perhaps only 20 spots left to squeeze in cars." Starting with a single pumpkin cannon in 2011, seasonal shows have grown, along with their arsenal of gourd guns. (AE/Rob Perry)