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Export date: Fri Oct 30 5:53:00 2026 / +0000 GMT

2023 Year In Review - Part 2

Attention Readers!

For this edition of the Shelburne Free Press, we are taking you through all the highs and lows of the last six months of 2023. The second half of our 2023 Year in Review will share some of the most significant stories impacting our readers from July to December. Without any further ado, here's a look back at the year that was!

July

Splash Pad at Greenwood Park opens to public

The local splash pad, known now as the Rotary Splash Pad at Greenwood Park, officially opened to the community on July 8.

?We're thrilled that the project is completed. It seems like it's been a long process, but $300,000 takes some time to raise. Everyone in the community has been so supportive of this project, and it has brought the community together,? said Sandra Gallaugher, chair of the Splash Pad Committee. ?It's been overwhelming, the support that we've received, and we thank everyone for participating.?

For more than a decade leading up to the splash pad's inception, residents in Shelburne and the surrounding areas expressed the need for the outdoor water recreation feature.

In October 2019, members of the Splash Pad Committee met with Shelburne Town Council to present the project idea. The presentation outlined a draft of the projected design, potential locations for the splash pad, cost for the project, and fundraising.

The committee met again with council in early 2020, where the location for the splash pad was decided to be Greenwood Park. The Shelburne Rotary Club later entered into a contract with Park N Play Design to provide the equipment for the splash pad.

The splash pad was budgeted at $700,000, with the committee raising $300,000 of it through donations and the Town of Shelburne contributing the remaining $400,000 and covering the annual operating costs.

Over three years, several fundraising events were held to help raise the community portion of the splash pads cost, including car washes, pizza giveaways, bottle drives, golf tournaments and cookie decorating. A number of local organizations and individual residents also made donations to help fund the project.

The Shelburne Splash Pad Committee and the Town of Shelburne celebrated breaking ground on the construction of the splash pad in January with a shovel-turning ceremony at the project's home, Greenwood Park.

?The opening of the Rotary Splash Pad at Greenwood Park this week is big news for our little community. This is something that was identified as a community priority at least as far back as 2009 and it's finally become a reality,? said Shelburne Mayor Wade Mills. ?Significant cred has to go to our Rotary Club and Community Splash Pad Committee partners who really led the fundraising charge and made this possible. This project really is a testament to what is possible when our community rallies around a cause and works together to realized a common vision. I am certain that this is an amenity which will be widely enjoyed for many, many years.?

Since its opening, many families from the community have been out to enjoy the new outdoor recreational amenity.

While the splash pad is located within the Town of Shelburne, it has been also been noted how the new amenity provides a close outdoor attraction for families in the communities surrounding Shelburne, including Mulmur, Melancthon and Amaranth.

The Rotary Splash Pad at Greenwood Park has several features, including an aqua cannon, five buckets, an aqua loop set, an aqua bash, and spray n wash.

Residents will be able to enjoy the local splash pad from between the hours of 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. from May to September.

Shelburne youth headed to Germany for World Dwarf Games

A local teen will be representing Canada on the international stage as he heads to Europe to take part in a multisport comp ztition.

Thirteen-year-old Shelburne resident Gabriel McHughan is gearing up to make his second appearance at the World Dwarf Games in Cologne, Germany later this month.

?I'm feeling good and I'm happy because I get to compete with my friends and hopefully win medals,? said McHughan in a phone interview with the Shelburne Free Press.

McHughan is among 46 Canadian athletes between the ages of 7 and 62 with dwarfism, who will be representing Canada at the multisport event the end of the month. He is set to compete in 8 of the 10 events including badminton, basketball, boccia, soccer, swimming, track and field, table tennis, and volleyball.

While the number of events may seem overwhelming, the local teen has been training with friends and family members to prepare for the games.

?This year, I wanted to try new sports and also try to get more medals than last time,? said McHughan.

He added that the events he is looking the most forward to is table tennis, badminton, and soccer.

McHughan first participated in the World Dwarf Games in 2017 when they were held in Guelph. At the time, he was the second youngest athlete to signup to compete for Team Canada, and finished the games with a gold medal in floor hockey and two bronze medals in track and field.

The McHughan family was introduced to the games through being members of Little People of Ontario and the Dwarf Athletic Association of Canada, both organizations that help connect little people in Canada and Ontario. After learning about Canada's successful bid for the 2017 World Dwarf Games, McHughan was signed up to take part.

?He never has anybody like him to play sports with. He plays a lot of team sports, but he's the only little person so he has to overcome a lot more than other kids do. I wanted him to be able to experience what it was like to compete against athletes that are like him,? said Crystal McHughan, Gabe's mother.

In an interview with the Free Press, she spoke about what it means to see her son compete in the World Dwarf Games again.

?He loves playing sports and to see him get to play against athletes that are like him, on an even playing field, it's amazing because they're all trying to do their best to win a medal.?

The World Dwarf Games (WDG) began in 1993 with the inaugural event held in host city Chicago, Illinois and featuring 165 athletes from ten countries. The games are held every four years in an elected host city.

This year, the games are being hosted in Germany are expected to be the largest to date with over 530 athletes from 29 countries set to compete.

Despite the number of athletes and countries participating in the competition increasing over the last twenty-year, the World Dwarf

Games continue to be less known compared to other multisport events such as the Olympics, Special Olympics and Paralympics.

What this means is the sponsorship dollars are not there and the athletes and their families often have to pay their own way ? travel and accommodations.

The Dwarf Athletic Association of Canada (DAAC) is looking to increase public knowledge of the competition as well as raise donates to help cover the costs.

?Unfortunately, it falls on the families to pay for it and we would love to have a bigger team going to Germany, but it's a lot of money,? explained Crystal McHughan.

She also noted that for her and Gabe to attend the competition in Germany it cost them just shy of $10,000.

Heading into the games the Free Press asked what Gabe's goals are while taking part in the competition.

?My first one is playing with my friends and doing the best I can. Number two is trying to win medals, number three would be having the most fun that I can have and number four is being there with my friends and family,? said Gabe.

August

Woman, 31, killed in seven car collision in Melancthon:

A 31-year-old woman from Barrie was killed on Tuesday after a transport truck entered a construction zone in Melancthon and collided with a lineup of vehicles.

Emergency responders were called to the scene of a serious collision involving seven vehicles, one being a transport truck, on County Road 124, south of 20th Sideroad, at around 3:10 p.m. on Monday (Aug. 22).

The collisions resulted in several injuries, including one fatality. The woman, who was pronounced deceased at the scene, was travelling with her infant child, who was transported by ambulance to a local hospital. The infant was later transported by ambulance to a children's hospital with non-life-threatening injuries.

The initial investigation revealed that multiple passenger vehicles were stopped in the northbound lane of County Rd. 124 in a construction zone. A tractor-trailer entered the construction zone and collided into the rear of the lineup of vehicles.

A 67-year-old man was extricated from his vehicle by firefighters and transported to a local hospital with serious injuries. He was later air-lifted by Ornge to a Toronto area trauma centre.

A 45-year-old woman and a 28-year-old man were transported to a local hospital with non-life-threatening injuries.

County Road 124 remained closed for approximately 10 hours.

The Traffic Collision Investigation (TCI) team of the OPP was brought in to investigate.

September

Dufferin Men's Shelter in crisis: Urgent funding requested to keep doors open

Dufferin County Council has declared the Dufferin Men's Shelter a ?project in difficulty' after receiving a request for emergency funding to keep their doors open for the remainder of the year.

During their meeting on Sept. 14, Dufferin County Council was presented with a business plan from Keith Ward, a Dufferin Men's Shelter board member, asking to obtain $215,000 in urgent funding. Ward said the funding would allow the shelter to remain open through the winter and into Dufferin County municipalities' budget cycles.

?When we started, we could only guestimate what the cost would be. No one else is doing this locally, it's not as if we have another comparator we could run out to and say ?please give us your numbers', we had to start from scratch,? explained Ward. ?We have numbers from shelters elsewhere in the GTA, but they're much higher and we knew it would take some real-world experience to come up with some better numbers.?

The Dufferin Men's Shelter, located at 59 Townline in Orangeville, was opened by the Choice's Youth Shelter organization in March 2023. The shelter provides local men aged 25 years and up experiencing homelessness an alternative to living on the street while connecting them with resources to transition to stable housing and gain independence. The shelter initially opened with 6 available beds but increased due to demand and now has a capacity of 20 beds.

According to Ward, the shelter, on average, sees between 10 to 13 men each night but has also seen as many as 15.

The County of Dufferin previously provided the shelter with $163,000 in funding when it opened earlier this year.

In a Health and Human Services Committee meeting held by County Council on Aug. 28, Dufferin Men's Shelter director Erin Goodyear said the funding had been used to pay staff members' salaries and that it has no other forms of revenue. She added that the shelter only had enough funding to support continued operation to the end of September.

The shelter has fundraised to gather additional financial support, but Ward said with the shelter's uncertain future, it's been ?impossible? to fundraise because there is no guarantee the service will continue.

He also noted the difficulty the shelter has faced in obtaining additional funding from other sources due to the lack of programs that cater to its demographic of solely serving men. With such limited support, the shelter relies on public funding and donations.

?Men are not an appealing population when it comes to shelters,? said Ward. ?There aren't programs out there that provide funding through other avenues as there are for women, for children, or for people subject to abuse.?

number of councillors raised concerns about the cost of the operations, which requires a base funding of $370,000 annually, and the possibility of additional funding requests from the group in the following months.

?There doesn't seem to be any long-term plan that isn't heavily or exclusively reliant on County funding,? said Dufferin County Warden Wade Mills. ?We're going to put some tax-based money at this to keep the lights on for a couple more months, but we're not really going to solve a problem.?

Coun. Fred Nix, deputy mayor of Mono, raised concerns with the cost of operating the men's shelter, noting that the roughly $152 per night cost is more expensive than putting an individual up in a motel for the night.

Coun. Darren White, also Melancthon's mayor, raised concerns about the sustainability of the men's shelter with the lack of revenue avenues within the business plan.

Dufferin County councillors also expressed concerns about what would happen should the men's shelter shut down due to a lack of funding from the County.

?I don't really care where the money goes, but if not this then what? There is a need for this service and it's growing,? said Coun. Philip Renstch, deputy mayor of Grand Valley. ?At the end of the day, this is the issue for this term so if you don't like this plan,

give me a better one ? I haven't heard one yet.?

In response to the funding request, County Council voted to name the Dufferin Men's Shelter a ?project in difficulty.' The declaration has a limited time status and would see staff members work with the organization to provide appropriate governance and financial sustainability.

County Council approved a motion to provide funding up to $116,000 to the Dufferin Men's Shelter based on the ?project in difficulty' model. The motion stipulates the funding would be given in monthly installments to reflect the monthly costs of operating the shelter. The motion also says a report must be given to County Council in a month to re-evaluate the funding.

October

Upper Grand District School Board exploring potential reshuffling of students from high capacity schools

The Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) is exploring the plausibility of moving students from high-capacity elementary schools to ones with more enrolment space.

In a press release issued on Monday (Oct. 23), the school board said it would be conducting a boundary review in order to address the accommodation pressures at Primrose Elementary School in Mulmur.

The rural school, which is serviced by a private well and septic system, has an operating capacity of 377 pupil spaces. In recent years, Primrose Elementary has experienced an increase in enrolment, and the current number of students enrolled in the school is approximately 580.

During a regular meeting in July, Shelburne Town Council received a report from the school board regarding their draft plan for long-term accommodation at schools.

According to the report, the proposed school to accommodate the boundary review, Centennial Hylands Elementary School, has an enrolment of 413 students with the capacity to accommodate a total of 541 students.

While looking at the capacity of the elementary schools, Shelburne councillors at the July meeting also urged the school board to investigate a boundary review of Centre Dufferin District High School, particularly regarding students from Grand Valley.

?It's an awfully long way to be bussing students from Grand Valley to Shelburne, and I know traditionally it's been the case because there are limited options for secondary schools, but in my humble opinion that's one area where I think the school board should be looking at a boundary adjustment,? said Shelburne Mayor Wade Mills.

Centre Dufferin District High School has a capacity of 798 students, and the school currently has 853 students enrolled. The enrolment at the high school is projected to grow to 895 by 2025 and 1,140 by 2030.

?This council in the last term has had a lot of complaints come to it that were not council related complaints due to the over crowding at the high school,? said Coun. Walter Benotto. ?When it's crowded things erupt, problems start existing and parents turn around and who do they blame ? us ? and we have no control over it.?

A boundary review is a staff process that allows the school board to review a variety of options for resolving issues with overcapacity and underutilized schools or when determining a new school boundary.

Any approved changes to the school boundaries are expected to be implemented for the 2024-2025 school year.

November

Shelburne approves five per cent tax hike for 2024

Shelburne Town Council has approved the adoption of the 2024 Budget, which will see a five per cent increase in the tax rate.

Carey Holmes, director of financial services and treasurer for the Town of Shelburne, presented a detailed report on the 2024 budget for the public during Town Council's regular meeting on Monday (Nov. 13).

?In the inflationary context with which we're in and everything else going on around us, I don't think a 5 per cent rate increase is unreasonable particularly when you look at the number of things that we're undertaking next year; it's a fairly ambitious year and a fairly moderate increase to go with it,? said Shelburne Mayor Wade Mills.

The five per cent increase in the tax rate will allow for an overall tax levy increase of nine per cent in tax dollars.

The estimated amount to be raised by taxation for 2024 is nearly $9.9 million, calculated by taking the total operating expenses of $12.9 million for 2023 and subtracting the revenues of just $3 million.

The total estimate for the 2024 general operating expenses of $12,944,252 is split up amongst eight expenditures: police ($3,281,670); operations and transit ($2,732898); general government and town hall ($2,739,043); recreation and culture ($1,471,686); planning and development (1,326,688); fire protection ($726,969); council and committees ($195,720); and other protective services ($469,578).

Some of the increase in expenses is the result of three additional staff positions in the town, which include a recreation programs special events coordinator, an operations analyst, and a utilities labourer. The town has also budgeted to purchase a new plow truck and parks and recreation pickup truck as well as increase reserve transfers to assist long-term capital assets.

Council was able to cut down the tax rate increase by nearly one per cent with the removal of the weekend transit service from the 2024 budget, which was estimated to cost $91,200.

The homeowner tax impact of a five per cent increase for the 2024 budget, based on an average single-family home assessment of $335,366, amounts to an additional $132 annually or $11 per month on the town portion for a total of $2,769.83 for the year.

The 2024 budget addresses a number of capital projects, including $101,311 for upgrades to the exterior of the Town Hall and a new server; $2,891,099 for connecting link paving, roads needs, drainage cleanout and the cemetery expansion; $1,415,000 to spend on new equipment and workshop expansion project; and $4,043,967 to go towards projects identified in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Nearly half of the capital projects for the 2024 budget will be focused on parks and recreation, leading to the financial plan being dubbed ?the year of the park?.

The 2024 budget totals $8,451,377 for the listed capital projects.

Water and Sewer capital projects total just over $2.5 million for 2024. The new projects associated with water include changes to Well #1 and developing a new Well #9, while the sewer capital project consists of the continued engineering design for the waste pollution control plant.

As part of the 2024 budget, it was suggested that Council use $300,000 from the tax stabilization reserve to help lower the tax levy, which would leave the tax stabilization reserve with a total of $214,299.27. The budget also recommended using $150,000 from the 2023 estimated surplus in the reserve. The tax stabilization reserve is set up to help offset tax hikes during financially challenging years.

Shelburne Town Council unanimously approved the 5 per cent tax rate increase for the 2024 budget.

Residents raise concerns about Strada Aggregate Gravel Pit at public meeting

Residents living close to the Strada Aggregate gravel pit in Melancthon had the opportunity to bring forward their questions and concerns on a wellness program created to protect their water quality and quantity.

Strada Aggregate hosted the public information session on Nov. 9 at the Horning's Mills Community Hall in Melancthon. The meeting was intended to advise property owners with wells and natural features within a three-kilometre radius of the gravel pit about the logistics of the WELLness Check Program.

?The turnout was great. The more people and the more questions, the better we can understand the concerns of the community and the better we can address those concerns,? said Kevin Powers, community liaison for Strada Aggregate. ?Meetings like this one are very important to us before we make our application, so that we can make our application better and ensure that it meets the needs of the people.?

The WELLness Check Program is one of the key schedules in an agreement signed by North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce (NDACT) and Strada Aggregate back in June. The program will assist with understanding existing environmental conditions, monitoring those conditions, and ensuring the proposed quarry if approved for a licence, will have no adverse effects on the surrounding water wells and the natural environment. The program will also see that should there be an impact to a well or natural feature, Strada would finance solutions.

By participating in the program, residents will give Strada Aggregate a baseline to reference the quality and quantity of their water if, in the future, there are any impacts brought on by quarrying below the water table.

One of the biggest concerns raised by residents during the information session was the fact that many of them had not been included in the ?target participation area?, while their neighbours had been.

?We looked at publicly available water wells records and assed where wells were installed based on those records. Some properties are shown to be installed in the same unit that we would potentially be taking water from on our property. There's the consideration that they could be linked and the potential impact for those,? explained hydrologist Alicia Kimberley.

Those same residents also raised concerns about having to cover the costs to fix their wells or natural features, even if Strada is at fault.

?Even if you do not sign up for the program, if there is a problem with your well and it is the fault of Strada because of its quarry operation, Strada is obliged by this agreement to immediately provide you with a continuous source of water until the reason is discovered. If the reason is Strada, they are on the hook for the cost of everything, event finding you a new source of water,? said Powers.

Speaking with the Free Press about the concerns raised by residents during the meeting, Powers said,

?Any concern is a fair concern, and we're happy to listen to them. A lot of people want to be involved in this program, and we're going to work with NDACT to determine whether or not to involve them more, but the more people that are involved, the better.

Strada Aggregate initially brought forward a presentation to Melancthon council in October of 2021, which noted their intention to submit an application for a proposed quarry. The Strada Aggregate quarry was proposed to be constructed in an existing gravel pit, located in the area of 4th Line and County Rd. 17 in Melancthon, and designed to extract 2 million tonnes of aggregate while extending below the water table.

In June, NDACT and Strada Aggregate signed an agreement that gave NDACT input and decision-making into Strada's quarry application before being submitted. As part of the agreement, NDACT will not oppose the application unless the science shows the quarry could harm the environment.

The agreement between the grassroots organization and the aggregate company has been described as unprecedented by NDACT.

December

Melancthon Mayor elected as 147 th Warden of Dufferin County

Dufferin County Council will be guided by knowing hands for the upcoming year with former Warden Darren White elected to lead council for 2024.

White was elected to the position, which he will hold for the 2024 term, during a County Council meeting last Thursday (Dec. 15). He is taking over the role from Shelburne Mayor Wade Mills, who chose to step back from the role after holding the position for the last two years.

The Warden is the head of Dufferin County Council and acts as the chief executive officer (CEO) for the County, leading council meetings, and providing representation at functions.

Concluding his election as the 147th Warden of Dufferin County, White was handed the floor to read the oath of office.

?It's certainly an honour to be nominated to fill this very important role,? said White.

Speaking with the Free Press, White said one of the biggest areas of focus for the council will be addressing the demands of inflation.

?We have to find new innovative ways to deal with this. We can't sit back and wait for other people to help us because clearly, they're not coming. So, we have to do it ourselves. We have to look at best practices of other municipalities and other areas to find ways to fix things for everybody, so we can really be an equitable and just society.?

The 2024 term will count as the fifth time White has served as Warden of Dufferin County. He was first elected to the position in 2017 and went on to serve as Warden from 2019 to 2021. Following the 2021 term, White chose not to seek re-election.

?We're going to be facing some pretty critical challenges over the next 12 months, and Darren certainly has experience in the role and a proven track record. I don't think there's anybody that would question his ability to fulfill this role and to do it well, so I felt very comfortable with somebody of his level of experience and capabilities to lead us forward over the next 12 months,? said Mills, who nominated White for the position.

During the meeting, four chairs were selected to lead the standing committees of County Council.

Orangeville Deputy Mayor Todd Taylor was selected as chair on the Infrastructure and Environmental Services Committee, Mono Mayor John Creelman will again lead the General Government Services Committee, Orangeville Mayor Lisa Post will oversee the Health and Human Services Committee, and Mulmur Mayor Janet Horner will continue as chair of the Community Development and Tourism Committee.