



*Elkview Gardens,
Melanie Drive, Aylmer*

City-County-CMHC Housing Assistance Alliance

On November 9, 2010, the City of St. Thomas, Elgin County and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) partnered to host the inaugural St. Thomas-Elgin Affordable Housing Forum. Stakeholders including developers, community agencies, support service providers and community leaders met to share community-based housing success stories, discuss social housing alternatives, and celebrate the accomplishments of local affordable housing developers. Elgin County Acting Warden Graham Warwick noted that “Through strong partnerships between the City, the County, community service providers and builders, 122 new units of affordable housing have been provided over the past

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Elgin County and Thames Valley District School Board Conclude Historic Agreement

On September 14, 2010, the County of Elgin and the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) signed a historic Letter of Agreement establishing a school-closures consultation protocol.

The agreement commits the TVDSB to consult affected communities before deciding to close schools in Elgin County. This new consultation process ensures that municipalities, residents, students and parents will have the opportunity to understand and comment on factors influencing TVDSB recommendations and decisions concerning rural and other schools facing low enrolment, facility decline and other challenges.

The Letter of Agreement will remain in force for four years and may be extended by mutual agreement. The County and



Front, left to right, TVDSB chairman Terry Roberts, Elgin County Warden Bonnie Vowel. Back, left to right, TVDSB director of education Bill Tucker, Elgin County school board trustee Frank Exley, Malahide Mayor and rural schools advocate John R. Wilson, and Elgin County school board trustee Tracy Grant.

the TVDSB have also agreed to hold joint public annual meetings to discuss educational accommodation challenges in Elgin County. Additionally, the agreement will be reviewed annually by the CAO for the County of Elgin and the Director of Education for the TVDSB.

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Elgin County Council, 2011-2014 Term

Bayham: Mayor Paul Ens

Malahide: Mayor Dave Mennill, Deputy Mayor Jim Jenkins

Aylmer: Mayor Jack Couckuyt

Central Elgin: Mayor Bill Walters, Deputy Mayor Dave Marr

Southwold: Mayor Jim McIntyre

Dutton/Dunwich: Mayor Cameron McWilliam

West Elgin: Mayor Bernie Wiehle

New County Signage Installed

Elgin County's award-winning branding is now visible on seven innovative gateway signs throughout the County. The largest of these has been installed on Highway 401 Eastbound at the Furnival Road / County Road 103 overpass. This particular sign has night-lighting powered by an adjacent solar panel.



Six replica versions of the 401 sign have also been installed at the following locations:

- County Road #3 (Talbot Line) at McPherson Road
- County Road #25 (Wellington Road)
- County Road #30 (Highbury Ave.) south of Thomson Line
- County Road #74 (Belmont Road)
- County Road #73 (Imperial Road)
- County Road #19 (Plank Road) south of Carson Line

While these six signs are not formally illuminated, they all have enhanced reflectivity for partial visibility at night. WSI Signs of Bolton was selected as the contractor for this project in accordance with the County's purchasing policy. Financial support for the project was provided by the Government of Canada through the Community Adjustment Fund, with additional funding by the County of Elgin.

Historic Agreement

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"The agreement emphasizes the importance of rural schools and the vital role they play in their communities," said Elgin County Warden Bonnie Vowel.

"This agreement is a major step forward in recognizing the importance of involving local community representatives in the review of potential school closures," said TVDSB Chair Terry Roberts.

According to its website, "The Thames Valley District School Board is now in the process of conducting Phase 3 of its Accommodation Review Committee (ARC) meetings....An ARC is required under the pupil accommodation review guidelines of the Ministry of Education when addressing the future of a school or group of schools." ARCs are "panels of parents, community members and educators charged with identifying schools that are underused and can be closed or consolidated."

West Lorne and Rodney Library Summer Reading Club



Shelley Fleming

In August 2009, the West Lorne and Rodney Libraries' 2009 Summer Reading Club Agent 009 received 2nd place in the TD Canada Trust Summer Reading

Club Awards. 150 children participated as Agent 009 Spies and spent the holidays completing their Spy Camp Booklets, reading a total of 2,448 books. The libraries received \$2000 and a plaque of recognition. Elgin County Council also presented each branch with a letter of congratulations.

To help encourage participation in the Club, a Principal Challenge was organized at Aldborough Public School, Rodney and St. Mary's Catholic School, West Lorne.

Those students who participated and read at least five books had an opportunity to slime their Principal at school assemblies held in September. The students wasted no time in achieving these goals! Larry the Library Card cheered on the students, and the local Fire Departments were present to de-slime the Principal.

Library Assistant Janet Given provided County Council with an overview of Summer Reading

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City-County-CMHC Housing Assistance Alliance

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five years.” Nick Ostojic of Novi Construction said “As a builder and landlord, I see the positive effects of modest, affordable housing on people’s lives in the community, especially seniors who are on fixed incomes. Working with the three levels of government has made building affordable housing possible in the community.”

Social housing is rent-g geared-to-income (RGI) or subsidized rental accommodation for low-income families, built with federal (CMHC) and provincial funding. Rent is charged at 30% of a family’s gross income. In December 2000, the Ontario Social Housing Reform Act effected the transfer of administrative responsibility for all social housing in Ontario to 47 local Service Managers. The City of St. Thomas is the Service Manager for St. Thomas and Elgin County, with costs shared by agreement with the County of Elgin. A total of 1,300 units of social housing currently exist in St. Thomas and Elgin County, with a mix of RGI and market units. Under the Social Housing Reform Act, the City must maintain and fund a minimum of 946 units of RGI housing. Properties are administrated and funded in accordance with the rules outlined in the Social Housing Reform Act or pre-existing CMHC Operating Agreements.

In addition to social housing, other programs available to help

people with housing include rent supplement programs for residents living with private landlords; the Housing Allowance Program providing up to \$150 per month toward rent; the Emergency Energy Fund to help with utility costs; the Homelessness Initiative Fund providing homelessness prevention assistance; and the Rent Bank providing assistance for up to two months of rent arrears.

Differing from “social housing” and its RGI criterion, “affordable housing” is a class of subsidized accommodation in which rents are set at 80% of the average market rent and there is no operational funding provided to the landlord. In 2003, the City of St. Thomas commissioned an Affordable Housing Needs Assessment, resulting in an Affordable Housing Strategy based on 43 recommendations, many of which have now been implemented. The Strategy’s key recommendation calling for 150 new units of affordable housing is close to completion, with 122 units built to date under the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program including 10 supportive units.

For more information on social housing, affordable housing and other housing assistance programs, please contact Elizabeth Sebestyen, Housing Administrator/Acting Director, St. Thomas – Elgin Ontario Works at 519-631-9350 ext. 126 or esebestyen@city.st-thomas.on.ca

Elgin County Library and the Community Access Program



CAP Coordinator Jessica Beringer

Since 1995, Industry Canada has funded the Community Access Program (CAP) to provide Canadians with affordable public access to the Internet and the tools to use it effectively. The Elgin County Library has participated in CAP since its inception. Currently eight Youth Interns provide training on using the Internet and computer software at all 10 Library branches, under the direction of Dutton Library Supervisor Mary Lou McMillan and facilitated by CAP Coordinator Jessica Beringer. Topics covered include email, job searching, resume writing, Internet safety, web page development, Service Ontario, and the Elgin County website. The Elgin County Library has high speed Internet and wireless Internet access at all ten branches, and since many of Elgin’s rural citizens do not have ready access to this technology, they really appreciate its availability at their local library.

CAP is currently renewed annually with no guarantee that it will continue. In a report to Elgin

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Summer Reading Club

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Club events. Enthusiastic Library Assistants Kelle Tomczyk and Sandra Fischer continue to encourage readers and recommend books to keep them reading. The 2010 Summer Reading Club, Destination Jungles, had an increase in participation, with 165 children reading 2,202 books, and expectations are high for the 2011 program, Splash, Summer Fun. Branch Supervisor Shelley Fleming commented "Each year our Summer Reading Club just keeps growing and the students always look forward to the next year's theme and challenge."

Elgin County Library and the Community Access Program

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County Council in April, 2010, Brian Masschaele, Director of Community and Cultural Services, recommended "That the Warden on behalf of County Council issue a letter to the Federal Minister of Industry in support of the Community Access program encouraging long-term and sustainable support for the program." The report received unanimous support. A supporting resolution, "Sustainable Federal Funding for Community Access Program," was adopted by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities at its annual meeting in September in Iqaluit, Nunavut, and a letter was sent to the federal Minister of Industry.

Growing With Books Program - Baby Fun Time at the Park

On September 1, 2010, babies from across Elgin County attended Baby Fun Time at the Park, a Growing with Books Celebration organized at Pinafore Park, St. Thomas by the Elgin County Library. With funding from The Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF), the library invited acclaimed baby entertainer Kathy Reid-Naiman to perform for our local tots in celebration of babies and early literacy.

The event was a tremendous success. Warden Bonnie Vowel was on hand to award the sleepest baby and the giggliest baby each with a \$25 gift certificate to Vesta Parenting in St. Thomas. Those in attendance had a chance to pick up one of the free Growing with Books literacy kits provided by the library to all newborns in Elgin and St. Thomas.

The library launched the Growing with Books program in 2003. Literacy kits are available through the Elgin-St. Thomas Health Unit during initial home visits, from the Mennonite Community Centre in Aylmer, at any of the 10 branches of the Elgin County Library, and at the St. Thomas Public Library. In late 2009, the library was awarded a \$75,000 grant from the OTF to purchase supplies that will sustain the program until 2015.



Meredith Goodwin, Engineering Technologist with the County's Engineering Services Department (since November 2003), and Emergency Management Coordinator (since February 2009), has accepted a new position as Senior Engineering Technologist with the Town of Innisfil.

During her tenure with the County, Meredith worked on a variety of engineering projects, including the Talbot Line Rehabilitation (2007-2010), County tourism signage program (2010), and renovations to the County Administration Building and the County's

three long-term care homes. In her role as the County's Emergency Management Coordinator, Meredith was responsible for maintaining the County's Emergency Response and Pandemic Plans, trained members of the Emergency Operations Centre and the Community Emergency Control Group, and prepared the annual County Emergency Exercise.

In addition to the professional challenges offered by her new position, Meredith, an avid snowboarder, looks forward to hitting the slopes at nearby Blue Mountain, Collingwood on a regular basis.