



Council Highlights

**Tuesday,
March 12, 2024**

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Bridging Gaps and Building Inclusivity: St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services Spotlight

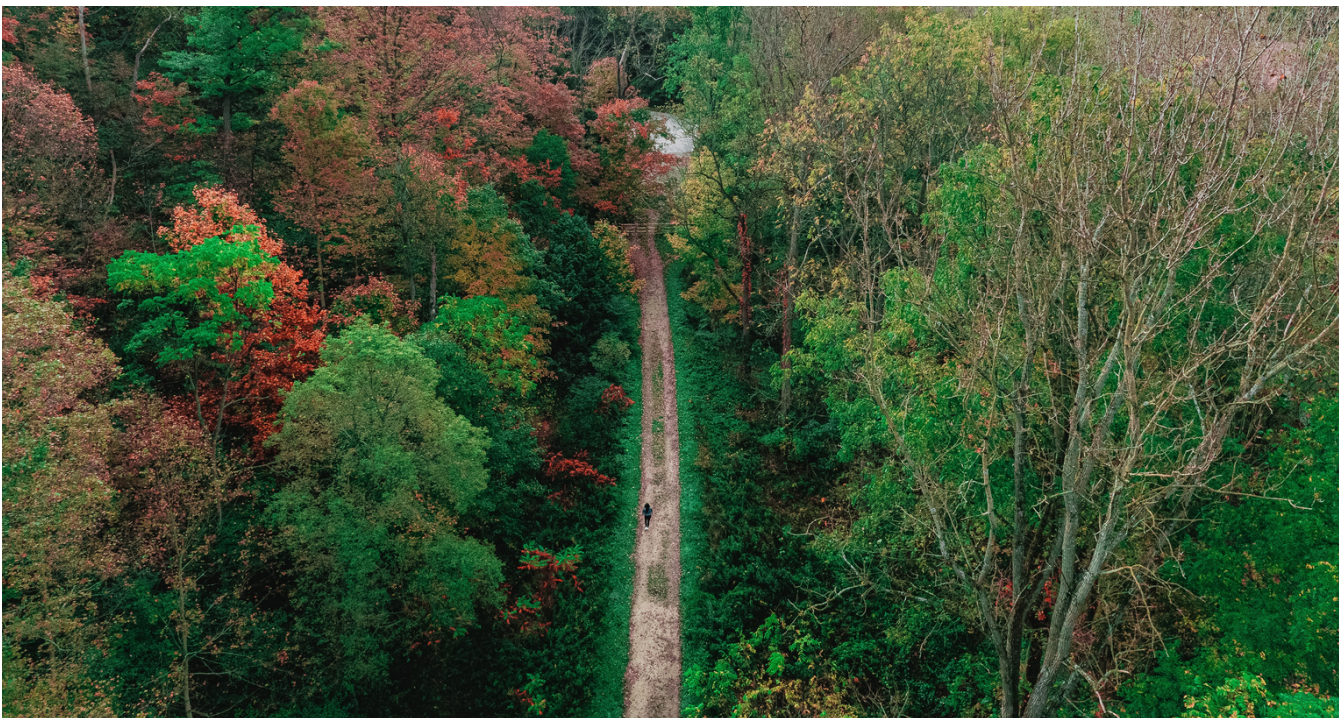
St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services delivered an insightful presentation on crucial aspects of their operations. Notably, they highlighted the cost-sharing ratios for essential services like Ontario Works, Children's Services, and Housing Services. The presentation shed light on the significant challenges posed by the province's decision to reduce administrative funding by \$598,000 for 2024, necessitating adjustments to mitigate anticipated municipal cost increases. Similarly, reductions in provincial funding for Children's Services indicate future financial strains, despite temporary one-time offsets for the current year.

The discussion also examined efforts to enhance accessibility to childcare services, particularly for marginalized groups and those with unique needs. With an initial plan targeting low-income families, vulnerable communities, and diverse populations, the initiative aims to bridge the gap between the current access ratio of 13.6% and the provincial target of 37%. Through extensive community engagement including surveys, focus groups, and consultations, stakeholders have collaboratively shaped strategies for allocating funding and establishing 701 new childcare spaces, poised to significantly elevate access levels to 37%. Such proactive measures reflect a commitment to inclusivity and responsiveness to community needs within St. Thomas and Elgin County.

Safeguarding Elgin County's Woodlands: Challenges and Conservation Efforts

Jeff Lawrence, Tree Commissioner/Weed Inspector, delivered two comprehensive reports to Council highlighting vital aspects of woodland conservation and weed control activities in Elgin County. A total of 60 applications for harvesting were submitted in 2023, with significant variances across municipalities. The total volume harvested in 2023 was approximately 2.298 million board feet. The total forested area involved in these harvests was approximately 1829 acres. Notably, conservation efforts extend beyond logging, as demonstrated by the approval of two woodland clearing applications, conditional upon adherence to the Elgin County No-Net-Loss Policy.

Amidst these activities, concerns loom over diseases like Oak Wilt, with confirmed cases detected in Ontario. The reports underscore the potential threat to Elgin County's oak trees, emphasizing the fungus's devastating impact, especially on the red oak group. The dissemination of information from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) warns against the movement of infected wood products, urging caution during tree pruning and firewood transportation to curb the disease's spread. Additionally, despite a decrease in weed complaints in 2023, ongoing educational efforts, including virtual workshops on various tree diseases, reflect a proactive approach in safeguarding the County's natural assets. Council received these reports for information while acknowledging the importance of continued vigilance and collaboration in safeguarding the County's natural resources for future generations.



Navigating the Future: Elgin County's Next Chapter in Tourism Signage

An important decision was reached regarding the future of the Elgin County Tourism Signage Program, with Council approving staff's recommendation to move forward with Option #1. This marks a significant milestone in the program's evolution, as it charts a new course to enhance wayfinding signage and elevate the visitor experience across the County.

Since its inception in 2010, the Signage Program has played a crucial role in guiding tourists to local attractions, contributing to the economic development of Elgin County. However, as signs age and administrative challenges mount, it became evident that a fresh approach was needed to adapt to changing needs and maximize effectiveness.

Option #1 proposes a redesign of the signage environment to streamline wayfinding and create a sense of arrival for visitors. By strategically placing signs at key decision points within the County's road network, tourists will be efficiently guided to prominent attractions and downtown areas, fostering exploration and supporting local businesses.

This forward-thinking approach not only addresses the limitations of the current program but also aligns with evolving trends in trip planning, emphasizing visitor experiences while minimizing clutter and confusion. In addition, by coordinating with ongoing engineering projects, Option #1 presents an opportunity to optimize resources and enhance the overall tourism infrastructure.

As Elgin County prepares for the implementation of the new Tourism Signage Program during the 2025 budget deliberations, stakeholders can anticipate a revitalized approach that not only meets the needs of today's tourists but also lays the foundation for sustainable tourism growth in the years to come.



***The example above are for illustrative purposes only.**

Elgin County Gears Up for a Celestial Spectacle: Total Solar Eclipse 2024

Members of Council were treated to two presentations that shed light on an upcoming celestial spectacle set to grace Elgin County skies. Peter Jedicke from the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada took the floor first, delving into the science of the total solar eclipse that will occur on April 8, 2024. The presentation, brimming with fascinating astronomical insights, will be repeated at Elgin County Library branches over the coming weeks, ensuring widespread community engagement and education on this rare cosmic occurrence.

Following Jedicke's captivating presentation, Carolyn Krahn, Manager of Economic Development and Strategic Initiatives, shared exciting details about the total solar eclipse and its implications for Elgin County. Drawing parallels to the 2017 total solar eclipse that captivated millions in Oregon, Krahn highlighted the economic and tourism opportunities the event presents for the community. Recognizing the potential economic boon and tourism opportunity, Elgin County began preparations in May 2023 to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for residents and visitors alike.

Consultations with local municipal partners and emergency management facilitated the mapping out of public viewing areas across the County, complete with parking and washroom facilities. This strategic approach aims to spread visitors across multiple locations, mitigating congestion and enhancing safety measures.

As the excitement builds for the impending eclipse, Elgin County stands poised to welcome visitors and residents to witness this awe-inspiring event. With meticulous planning, proactive outreach, and community collaboration, April 8th promises to be a momentous day for astronomy enthusiasts, residents, and visitors.

EXPERIENCE THE SOLAR ECLIPSE!
MONDAY, APRIL 8TH, 2024

Public Viewing

The locations listed are the best spots in Elgin County to view the Eclipse, which offer free public parking.

- 1 Port Glasgow Beach
- 2 Backus-Page House Museum
29424 Lakeview Line
- 3 Fingal Wildlife Area
34469 Fingal Line
- 4 Port Stanley Main Beach
- 5 Port Stanley Little Beach
- 6 Port Bruce Beach
- 7 Port Burwell East Beach
- 8 Aylmer Wildlife Management Area
10594 Hacienda Rd.

ElginCounty
Share your experiences with others!

More information at elgincounty.ca

Council Approves 2024 Budget: Prioritizing Growth and Essential Services

Elgin County Council is pleased to announce the approval of its combined operating and capital budget for 2024, totaling \$101.6 million. The budget reflects Council's commitment to delivering essential services while managing fiscal challenges and fostering economic growth in the region.

The approved budget includes an increase in the tax rate of 3.79%, equating to a \$25 increase per \$100,000 of residential assessment. This adjustment is necessary to address rising cost pressures and ensure the continued delivery of government-mandated services and critical infrastructure projects.

In developing the budget, Council and the Budget Committee carefully considered feedback from residents gathered through various channels, including the annual budget survey and the budget open house. The resulting budget strikes a balance between meeting community needs, maintaining service levels, and planning for future growth opportunities.

Residents and stakeholders are encouraged to review the detailed 2024 Budget Document, which provides comprehensive insights into budget allocations and strategic priorities. The document can be accessed by visiting <https://engageelgin.ca/investinginelgin>.

Key budget highlights for 2024 include:

- Enhanced staffing for Planning, Fire School, and Human Resources departments
- Continued construction on the Terrace Lodge Redevelopment Project
- Reconstruction of St. George Street (CR 26), including new curb, storm sewer and sidewalk, valued at \$3.6M
- Rehabilitation of Dexter Line (CR 24) between Yarmouth Centre Road and Quaker Road, including pavement recycling, hot mix asphalt resurfacing and paved shoulder cycling lanes to complete the cycling network connection between Port Stanley and Port Bruce along Dexter Line, valued at \$1.1M
- Reconstruction of Port Talbot Hill (Fingal Line, CR 16), including road slope rehabilitation, curb, storm sewers and guide rail, valued at \$2.6M

Elgin County remains steadfast in its commitment to fiscal responsibility, community engagement, and strategic investment, ensuring a prosperous future for all residents and stakeholders. The County thanks all residents and businesses for their continued participation and support.

For the complete **March 12, 2024 Agenda Package**, please visit the following link:
[County Council Agenda Package](#)