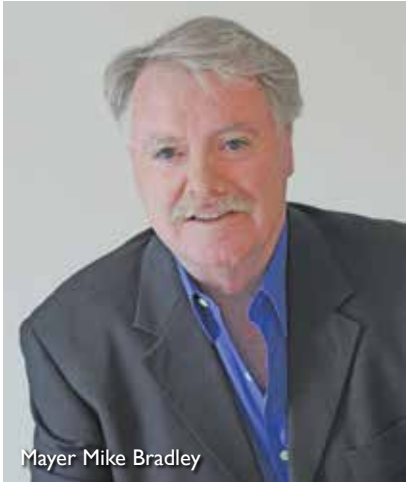


COVER STORY

Bradley wants curtailed spending and no tax increase

by Chris Cooke



Mayor Mike Bradley

Sarnia Mayor Mike Bradley is pushing Council to “hang on” to some \$3.5 million in projected surplus to offset ballooning tax defaults that could crimp municipal revenue next year. “We are seeing what appears to be a second wave of the pandemic,” says Bradley suggesting “there will be significant challenges ahead”.

Cost mitigation measures including restructuring departments, leaving full time positions unfilled and not hiring 160 summer students eliminated \$2 million from the municipal budget leading to a projected \$400,000.00 year – end surplus.

That coupled with \$3.1 million in Federal relief funding has provided the City with the surplus, which the Mayor wants to use to curtail spending and provide financial relief to beleaguered taxpayers.

Bradley told First Monday he wants to maintain municipal spending at this year’s level. He says the business community, especially restaurants and service industries have been hard hit by the pandemic and are “fragile”.

“The objective will be to not raise taxes,” says Bradley noting the \$3.1 million from the Federal Government is intended to ease financial pressures caused by COVID-19. And he suggests those pressures could hit later in the year and into next.

“The patio season for restaurants is coming to an end,” adding some businesses are functioning at a very low level. Bradley says the worst may be ahead as restaurants move to indoor dining at 50% capacity.

The Mayor used Bluewater Power as an example saying the utility is seeing increased defaults as people struggle to pay their bills.

On the flip side construction appears robust with the Tricar residential tower on the former Sarnia Gazette property and reconstruction of the Bayside Mall underway. Construction has also started on a Sifton Properties residential subdivision on Modeland Road.

Bradley says inconsistencies in the economy caused by the pandemic are a concern. “This is not just a few months as it appeared last Spring but could last well into 2021”.

Which is why Bradley is pushing for the City to be debt free. The debt is down to about \$5 million providing what he describes as “breathing room”.

However, he fears for small businesses saying, “we will get a better look at the economy as we head into the Christmas season”.

Bradley says the City needs to do “the right things to get people back into restaurants and back to a sense of normalcy”.

He believes one of those right things is maintaining the masking bylaw, which continues until at least the year end.

Bradley staunchly rejects the views of anti-masking groups that have approached Council.

