

Sarnia has a dual economy, positive and negative

by Chris Cooke



There is a building boom going on in Sarnia in the midst of a pandemic.

But Sarnia Mayor Mike Bradley says the construction blitz is based on the future, post pandemic not now.

At least a dozen projects including reconstruction of Bayside Mall, the Tricar residential towers downtown, a retirement home on Devine Street, 900 modular apartments behind Giant Tiger and Tepperman's Furniture on London Road and condominiums at the former Herbie Crabb Golf Course in Bright's Grove are in various stages of planning and construction.

As Bradley notes that doesn't include hundreds of new housing units east of the City. All of it he says is based on an expected surge in the economy once vaccines are rolled out and the pandemic subsides.

Bradley describes the situation as "fluid" noting segments of the economy; retail, restaurants and service industries are hurting while other businesses have adapted and are actually surging.

Growth in construction he says has been unprecedented with supply chain issues for manufacturers of wood products, furniture and appliances.

Developers have seen the market and are building for the future says Bradley.

While the administration at City Hall is focused on the second wave of the pandemic, which

Bradley suggests is worse than the first developers and contractors are looking ahead four or five years.

With erosion taking place in the use of hydrocarbons Bradley says the Chemical Valley is being forced to adapt and suggests there will be a push toward hydrogen. "The Valley is looking forward and while shifts can be painful there are opportunities ahead," he says.

NOVA Chemicals which is staging construction of its \$2 billion polyethylene plant on Rokeby Line, Suncor and Imperial Oil have all announced plans for staff reductions.

In the meantime, the City is dealing with a relentless pandemic with a surge in cases.

As part of an action plan Bradley is calling on the Province to stall property reassessments by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation. That was done last year and Bradley says "municipalities are already receiving requests from property owners and businesses to delay property taxes or forgive interest that would be owed on late payments".

