

Sarnia's city kitchen needs an overhaul

Margaret Bird - January 2025

Wouldn't it be great if 'Out with the Old and In with the New' was really happening with the start of 2025, especially after projecting a \$2.5-million budget deficit to end 2024?

But, first, we need some positivity and joy to wish you all a healthy New Year, where dreams, hopes and prayers, for you and your families, are realized.

Sadly, mayor, council and senior bureaucrats haven't improved the budget at all so they're still 'baking' with the same ingredients, so to speak. This means, unfortunately, that nobody took heed of December's public performance appraisal, so a slice of the city pie chart still looks the same.

If we're ever going to exit this awful economical and dictatorial situation, the taxpayers must speak up and state how they want 2025, and their future, to evolve. The following examples are just a small selection of problems needing urgent attention – most of them all about moolah. And, without the legal ability to print our own greenbacks, we are doomed because the city's kitchen scales do not balance when it comes to our domestic economy.

When it comes to salaries, we should take a leaf out of the county's book by decreasing the city's senior administrator's salary by half, since the county has double the amount of employees of the city but their senior administrator earns less. Stop empire building and only create new departments where necessary. Why buy extra ingredients when you're not doing any baking? This includes all the Toronto-based consultants.

Sarnia Lambton Tourism is, potentially, the most important industry, and to which, the City of Sarnia contributes financially. We have a great airport and its economic triggers are totally ignored. Sarnia has a great geographical location, offering travel by air, water, land, and rail. Huron Aviation, at Sarnia Airport, offers 4-seater sightseeing flights, at 1200 feet, in any direction – half hour or an hour, for very economical rates. Most residents don't even realize we have this great tourist feature because it's never advertised or promoted. If it was, we would have a constant stream of visitors/tourists from April 1 through to October 31, boosting revenues and taxes everywhere. And, removing provincial tourist offices, with government employees now working from home, is definitely NOT the way to do it.

Our train station used to be a very busy place, with several trains daily offering great connections to Toronto for business people and tourists. Very interesting way to travel, meeting many different people, relaxing with a good book, or just people watching while enjoying breakfast.

Whether taking a trip down river on the Duc d' Orleans, viewing all the river islands, while enjoying a wonderful buffet, or sailing on Lake Huron, the scenery and experiences are unforgettable in this hidden border-city gem.

We have country roads, main roads, and motorways all connecting us to the next village, town, city, or province.

And we can offer a great selection of hotels, too. Sarnia Lambton can accommodate everyone, no matter what their choices are but, inexplicably, this area still remains an untapped opportunity. Chemical Valley's petrochemical industries used to be the impressive world headquarters. They offered jobs, at all levels and professions, for continuous generations. But, once again, with the wrong menus, municipal recipes and council chefs, the future wasn't taken care of appropriately. The wrong people are in the kitchen! We need to bring back innovation, and better recipes for our future.

Our education has changed into indoctrination of a particular set of beliefs, ideas and attitudes without allowing any possibility of question or challenge against it. This is not how we produce alert, thinking individuals, who have the confidence to question everything around them and grow themselves and the future, side by side. We need drastic change to preserve the future for the generations to come.

Healthcare must improve all round and should always focus on 'first do no harm'. Good health doesn't make any money for those in the medical and pharmacological professions. If we're ever going to find a solution for homelessness, and the problems in Long Term Care, we first have to address how the healthcare industry is currently implemented. Band-aid enabling is not the right recipe here.

Separation and discrimination must be stopped. We need total inclusion and equity for our residents. Sarnia is mostly made up of seniors. There's an influx of retirees settling here. If we continue blocking new firms starting up, or relocating here, to offer a greater variety of professions, then we will continue to get all retirees buying the new homes or apartments. This

will stop the younger generations from returning here after college. Vibrant, affluent communities succeed by having a greater menu of jobs, and a population of all age groups.

The day-to-day necessities, e.g., roads and flood zones, must always be taken care of, first, before the nice-to-haves can ever be considered. Coronation Park has been continuously overlooked and, like many other things, costly band-aid solutions are not the answer.

Let's stop the over-abundance of committees, meetings, consultants, personal agendas and barbecues, and get the kitchen in order. The chef, cooks and servers all need to be working from the same recipe to justify their election and employment into these positions, and meet the expectations of the taxpayers. We must reinstitute a recipe that is cost effective, does no harm, protects our residents, and promotes our future.