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Rose Marie Osbourne captured this frost-covered landscape while driving through Wilmot Township Feb. 5 and shared it to the Show Us Your Wilmot Facebook page.

Wilmot council debates detailed 2026 budget release

Hours of questions and debate result in small decrease in tax levy

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

Wilmot Township homeowners will see a 9.1 per-cent hike on their tax bills in 2026.

The increase will amount to approximately \$217 per year for the average homeowner. With the increased water and wastewater rates factored in, the total

impact sits just under \$300.

Members of council peppered Mayor Natasha Salonen and staff with questions during a meeting that stretched past five hours on Monday night. Before the meeting started, the taxpayer was on the hook for a 9.7 per-cent hit.

The budget was tabled on Jan. 9 by Salonen as part of her strong mayor responsibilities. A press release said the

document was developed with a collaborative approach "with township staff, council and financial experts from KPMG following a comprehensive review of historical spending and financial data."

Salonen hired the consulting firm to develop the budget and a long-term financial plan. Council introduced several amendments during the process,

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Wilmot's water may offer relief for Mannheim service area water capacity constraint

AMANDA NELSON

Gazette Reporter

The Region of Waterloo is reviewing its Wilmot water-taking policy, first created in 1980 and updated in 1984, which governs how water from wells in Wilmot Township can be used.

Wilmot's main wells, which serve Baden and New Hamburg, have enough supply to support local growth through 2051. They can also provide about 30 litres per second of additional water to the Mannheim service area, where the region is currently facing capacity constraints.

"Transferring some of that water would not jeopardize the current or future water supply for the remaining areas of Wilmot Township," said Geoff Moroz, manager of hydrogeology and source water programs for the Region of Waterloo. "This would help the Mannheim service area capacity constraint that we have today."

Moroz said provincially required testing shows the Wilmot aquifer contains a large supply of water and can be pumped at high levels without being depleted.

The region is permitted by the province to take up to 150 litres per second, and long-term

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TIM LOUIS

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Wilmot homeowners face 9.1% tax increase in 2026 budget

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including a reduction to the mayor and council's development, conferences and events budget, which had increased to \$43,000 from just under \$18,000 in 2025. It was finalized at \$25,000.

Salonen pledged her intent not to veto any council amendments at the end of the meeting.

"The 2026 budget right-sizes funding for essential municipal services while supporting major infrastructure upgrades, community facility improvements, road-safety initiatives and ongoing modernization efforts," said a township press release.

Capital investments include replacing the HVAC system at the Wilmot Recreation Complex Aquatics Centre, advancing traffic calming initiatives and renovations at the St. Agatha Community Centre.

Salonen said the budget reflects a fundamental shift in how Wilmot plans for its future.

"For the first time this term, council and the community had the opportunity to provide input before a draft budget was created. We brought in external expertise,

implemented zero-based budgeting and are now undertaking long-term financial planning."

She said her goal was to make responsible decisions today that ensure stability, transparency and resilience for the township tomorrow.

Once the dust had settled, the Gazette heard from several councillors who gave their thoughts on the township's first strong mayor powers budget.

Coun. Lillianne Dunstall said the process was disappointing, and with the mayor holding veto authority, it was ultimately her budget.

"My main concern remains the classification of more than \$500,000 that I believe should have been treated as operational spending but was placed in the capital budget."

Dunstall raised the issue during the meeting and was advised that these items could be placed under capital. She said while that may be permissible, it does not change the message delivered to residents.

"Council consistently communicated that the capital levy was about

infrastructure. When more than half of that levy is directed to non-infrastructure items such as studies, surveys and training, residents deserve to know that."

She added her concern is about transparency and ensuring constituents clearly understand how their tax dollars are being used.

Coun. Kris Wilkinson said strong mayor powers change how budgets are passed, but they do not change the public's right to transparency or council's responsibility to take a deep dive into the numbers.

"This process has resulted in less information being shared publicly. That undermines accountability and needs to be corrected."

Salonen defended the process, saying all elected officials had plenty of opportunity to get involved.

"Council has had full access to the first draft of the budget since Dec. 19 and had the opportunity to review all line-by-line details with staff. The budget document that was provided to the public on Jan. 9 followed municipal best practices by clearly linking spending to priorities and funding sources."

She added a budget is only one part of financial transparency, and with a new treasurer on staff, regular reporting on actuals, variances and other key financial information will be provided to council and the public to strengthen financial oversight.

Coun. Harvir Sidhu was also disappointed

with this year's budget process.

"The use of strong mayor powers significantly limited council's ability to meaningfully contribute, and I'm not satisfied with the outcome. I would have liked to see greater investment in core community infrastructure alongside a more deliberate and visible effort to control costs."

He is hoping there will be greater transparency in how the budget is developed going forward.

"I hope there will be a renewed focus on being respectful of taxpayers' hard-earned dollars."

Coun. Steven Martin had more of a positive outlook on the budget, but admitted it was unique as a result of strong mayor powers.

"This budget process has been a different one since it is a strong mayor's budget. In September, Coun. Dunstall and I held a town hall meeting, inviting community participation. On Dec. 30, Coun. Cressman and I met with the mayor, CAO and interim director of finance to discuss the budget before it went public. There were opportunities to give feedback."

He added the process was mandated by the province and the township did its best to collaborate.

"I believe that the current budget is an attempt to give accurate reporting and work on our plan from last year to build up reserves."

Coun. Stewart Cressman did not respond.



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Region considers using Wilmot surplus water to address Mannheim constraints

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testing at or near that level has shown the system remains stable.

Moroz said Wilmot has enough water to support its own growth while also helping relieve the Mannheim shortage, and that modern science and regional planning make the process safer and more reliable than when the policy was written more than 40 years ago.

Wilmot Mayor Natasha Salonen supports using surplus water in the short term but is asking council to slow the process, increase transparency and avoid making permanent decisions until the science is complete.

"I'm asking council to temporarily suspend the 1980 Wilmot water-taking policy, rather than revoke it, until the region's new water supply strategy is completed and presented to regional council in 2027,"

Salonen said.

"I appreciate what staff want to do, and being able to use what they're identifying as surplus water short term," she added. "My council is also okay with that, but we don't want to just blanket say yes. We want reporting to both us and the public."

While regional staff said extensive monitoring and safeguards are already in place, Salonen said more clarity is needed to protect Wilmot residents. She outlined six conditions she wants addressed, including public reporting on any water taken, protection for private wells, creeks and farmland, a clear definition of surplus water, and proof that Wilmot's own growth will not be affected.

Salonen's request was deferred to the next council meeting for further clarification and refinement.



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Developers urge region to ease water capacity freeze at regional committee meeting

AMANDA NELSON

Gazette Reporter

More than 20 delegations addressed councillors and staff at the Region of Waterloo's Feb. 10 sustainability, infrastructure and development committee meeting over the Mannheim Service Area water capacity constraint.

Regional Coun. Berry Vrbanovic introduced a motion directing staff to work with area municipalities to use up to 50 per cent of projected new water capacity coming online within the next five years to support development approvals. The motion would allow municipalities to continue processing and approving development applications deemed complete before Dec. 4, 2025.

Local construction businesses, committees and industry associations urged council to approve the motion and improve communication around the region's water capacity challenges.

Builders and developers told regional council that a lack of clear information remains a core concern, and they are seeking detailed guidance on how development applications will be processed.

Mark Melo, president of IN4Structure Ltd., highlighted

the impact of the water capacity constraints on the region's \$1-billion construction industry. He said early engagement with contractors and stakeholders, alignment of growth forecasts with construction timelines, and use of governance tools under Bill 60 are needed to ensure efficient and responsible infrastructure delivery.

"Respectfully, I'm asking this committee to prioritize predictable, long-term infrastructure funding, engage contractors and stakeholders early on, align growth forecasts with real construction timelines, and explore policy and governance tools that help accelerate delivery," Melo told councillors.

He said workers and their families across the region depend on stable, predictable employment and the uncertainty is being felt well beyond the construction sector.

"Infrastructure investment isn't glamorous," Melo said. "It's not a ribbon-cutting or a photo opportunity, but when you drive past a fire hydrant or a manhole lid, that's not just metal on the ground. That's the lifeline of this region. That's what keeps homes safe, businesses operating and growth possible."

Larry Masseo, policy adviser with the Waterloo Region Home Builders' Association, echoed those concerns and

said freezing development approvals could slow economic growth and put jobs at risk.

Melissa Durrell, executive officer with Durrell Communications, speaking on behalf of Build Urban, said the development freeze is already affecting the region's economy. She cited delayed or cancelled projects including a 300,000-square-foot space and a \$500-million advanced manufacturing facility, which she said represent more than \$1 billion in lost investment and hundreds of jobs.

"We're seeing firsthand how the development freeze is affecting the broader employment landscape," Durrell told council. "Projects rely on years of relationship-building with lenders, investors and capital partners to secure financing. When confidence in the region weakens, capital moves to more predictable markets and local job opportunities are lost."

Vrbanovic's motion on water capacity constraint solutions was referred to regional council and is scheduled to be considered at the Feb. 25 meeting.



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The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette

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East Zorra-Tavistock budget timeline announced

Ratepayers have an opportunity to have their say

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

If all goes according to plan, East Zorra-Tavistock (EZT) will approve its 2026 budget on April 1.

Township CAO Karen DePrest gave council a report at its Feb. 4 meeting and explained Mayor Phil Schaefer chose not to utilize his strong mayor powers to table a budget himself.

"The strong mayor deadline was Feb. 1. As he had already committed, he had delegated the plan for us to do a council budget so council would oversee the process."

She added Schaefer has been an active participant in the budget's development.

"He sat alongside senior staff a week ago just to go through how we bring the budget document together. We are going to have another discussion about the capital budget, but this report is strictly to demonstrate the timelines and to put it out to the

public."

DePrest said she will present the draft document to council at the regular meeting on March 4 at 9 a.m.

"We are proposing a special meeting of council to be held on Tuesday, March 10, at 9 a.m. in council chambers to allow us to do a working session as we have in the past, going over each department one by one."

A public meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 18, at 7 p.m., allowing residents to speak to council. The budget bylaw is expected to be presented for approval at the regular council meeting on April 1.

Schaefer said he appreciated having an active role in the development of the document.

"We've done the operating budget portion and will be finishing with the capital later today. I found it a very worthwhile exercise to be involved from that point.

Just like other years, this is a budget that is built from the ground up, and council will have the ability to provide input."

He is also hoping members of the public will provide input on what they would like to see in the 2026 budget.

"The public meeting and budget schedule will be advertised on our social media. The dates indicated in the council report ... will be added to our budget page on the website. The draft budget will be posted on the EZT website on March 6."

There were no delegations from the public during last year's deliberations, but the township did not advertise the meeting.

Anyone looking to make verbal or written comments should contact EZT clerk Meaghan Vader before March 10 at 4:30 p.m. for inclusion at the March 18 meeting.

"Letting us know ahead of time with the nature of their comments is helpful for staff to be prepared to provide necessary context or more information if needed, but

it is not required that they register. Anyone who shows up will be allowed to participate by providing their comments or questions to council during the public-meeting portion of the meeting," the mayor added.

In keeping with the township's adopted approach to capital planning, the five-year capital forecast now reflects projects planned from 2026 to 2030.

"The team also thinks it would be prudent to continue to have a separate, dedicated special meeting of council," said DePrest's report to council.

"Staff will also be doing a comparison review of the township's user fee schedule as part of this year's budget during February. Recommended additions/deletions or adjustments to the fee schedule will be included in the March 4 update. Any fee changes will come into effect on July 1 to give adequate notice to all users," it added.

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Wilmot Township staff to draft bylaw allowing WRPS cameras on municipal property

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

The Waterloo Regional Police Service (WRPS) could soon be permitted to install CCTV cameras on municipal property in Wilmot Township following direction given to staff at Wilmot council's Feb. 2 committee of the whole meeting.

Council directed staff to bring forward a bylaw that would authorize the Township of Wilmot to enter into an agreement with the WRPS for the installation and operation of CCTV cameras and related infrastructure for law-enforcement purposes, including public safety, crime prevention and evidence collection.

"The Waterloo Regional Police Service intends to access video footage from their own CCTV cameras to support the reduction of crime and create public safety, improve quality of evidence for criminal investigations, and to extend the front-of-line and investigative resources for the police service," Wilmot director of community services Christ Catania said. "The Waterloo Regional Police Service has approached various municipalities that make up the region to implement video-camera capacity to support the frontline operations and improve investigative outcomes."

The direction follows a report from community services staff outlining WRPS'

regional CCTV initiative, which is being rolled out across municipalities in the region after the police service secured provincial funding through a Ministry of the Solicitor General grant program. WRPS received matching provincial funding in 2025 after applying for support to expand its use of fixed surveillance technology.

If approved by council, the agreement would allow WRPS to install cameras on township-owned or operated infrastructure such as light poles along roadways. The cameras would be used to support frontline policing, improve investigative outcomes and reduce crime while balancing public safety with privacy considerations.

According to WRPS Insp. Jarrett Brown of the police service's innovation and modernization unit, the potential use of CCTV cameras on municipal property is part of a broader, collaborative community safety approach.

"The request for permission to install cameras is intended to support policing and community safety in large geographic and rural areas," Brown told the Gazette. "Strategically placed cameras on township property can improve public safety by assisting with investigative outcomes, support identification of vehicles or individuals involved in serious crimes, enhance situational awareness during major incidents and serve as a crime prevention

and deterrence strategy."

"Proposed camera locations are identified through an evidence-based process. WRPS reviews multiple years of crime data and citizen-generated calls for service, with particular attention to patterns related to violent crime and repeat victimization. This analysis is used to identify locations where cameras may have the greatest public safety and investigative value. By partnering with townships and municipalities, WRPS can leverage existing infrastructure to install the cameras."

Brown said privacy considerations are a central component of the program. The report by township staff states WRPS has completed a Privacy Impact Assessment and would be required to comply with the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Video footage would be retained for 30 days unless required for an active investigation, and stored using encrypted, cloud-based systems compatible with WRPS' digital evidence management platform. Access to footage would be audited and restricted.

"On one hand ... I am in favour of obviously assisting the police through investigations and making sure they have access to the information that they need and in a timely manner; and obviously, video surveillance can help in that matter," said Coun. Kris Wilkinson. "At the same time, in terms of keeping in mind privacy and people's rights to it, I don't know how I feel about endorsing this. So ... I will take a wait-and-see approach, I guess, to see what the final (bylaw and agreement) will look like."

According to the report, the proposed system would include a mix of camera types, including pan-tilt-zoom cameras, fixed "bullet" cameras and quad cameras. Some cameras would be used as automatic licence plate readers at key entry and exit points into the region, while others would be installed at traffic intersections or in areas identified as crime "hotspots" through WRPS data analysis. Cameras would not be used for speed enforcement.

"There are regional pieces to this as well like regional roads, provincial Highway 7/8 as well," Catania said. "Ultimately, they're going around to the lower-tier municipalities to get ... some endorsement because as much as they can put these cameras up potentially at regional intersections, I think it could be problematic for

local municipalities if they don't understand why this is happening if they don't have their endorsement from council first."

"So, they're ... trying to engage with the local municipalities first before they go ahead with any of these programs. I think at this point, their analysis would suggest they'd be looking at certain key areas that might warrant an installation of a camera. Based on this program ... you'd see more cameras, probably, in the bigger cities than you would in the lower-tier townships. I don't see a big influx in CCTV cameras (in Wilmot) at this point based on the grant funding they're receiving."

Cameras would be powered using existing streetlight infrastructure and accessed through WRPS' real-time operations centre. While the system would have live-monitoring capabilities, cameras would not be routinely monitored in real time except during major incidents. Access would be limited to a small number of authorized WRPS personnel.

The township would retain oversight through the agreement, including reviewing WRPS privacy documentation and receiving notice of proposed camera locations. While cameras would be installed on municipal property, ownership, maintenance, repair and liability would remain the responsibility of WRPS, with no cost to the township.

The township, Catania explained, would retain the ability to opt out of the agreement to allow cameras on municipal properties at any time with 60 days notice. In response to a question from Coun. Stewart Cressman about whether the police service would share data about when the cameras are used and how successful they are in assisting police, Catania said he would take that question back to WRPS for more information.

As part of the rollout, WRPS has already held public consultation meetings and plans to post a map identifying CCTV camera locations on its website. Any agreement with Wilmot would align with provincial guidelines issued by the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario regarding video surveillance by public institutions.

Staff will return to council with a bylaw and finalized agreement for consideration at a future meeting.

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Tavistock Optimist Club marks 50th anniversary with major park-improvement project

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

The year 2026 is shaping up to be a milestone one for the Tavistock Optimist Club as members celebrate the organization's 50th anniversary with an ambitious community park-improvement project.

Founded in 1976, the Tavistock Optimist Club is marking its golden anniversary by expanding its park pavilion and installing a new ballpark lighting system at the club's 11-acre park on the western edge of Tavistock. Club members say the upgrades are aimed at enhancing community events, improving safety for youth sports and creating an even more welcoming space for family gatherings.

All work on the project will involve local contractors and businesses, keeping labour and investment within the community. The club hopes the improvements will serve residents for decades to come.

The Tavistock Optimist Club currently has 94 members ranging in age from their mid-20s to mid-80s, making it one of the largest Optimist clubs in the region. Eight charter members who helped establish the club half a century ago remain actively involved today.

Plans for the pavilion include a 1,600-square-foot addition attached to the northwest side of the existing structure. Once completed, the expanded space will better accommodate tournaments,



A concept image shows the planned pavilion expansion and other improvements at the Tavistock Optimist Park as part of the club's 50th anniversary community project. Various levels of donors will be recognized at the park once construction is complete.

celebrations and community gatherings throughout the year. The addition of modern ballpark lighting will also allow for safer evening activities and extended use of the park.

To support the \$200,000 fundraising goal for the project, the club has planned a series of events throughout the year. A fundraising kickoff concert is scheduled for Saturday, June 6, featuring the popular



(GARY WEST PHOTOS)

Tavistock Optimist Club members helping spearhead the 2026 park-improvement project include, from left, Jeff Schwartzenruber, Eugene Bender, Jesse Weicker and Eric Bender.

Highway 21 band. Friday Night Fries will also return for June, July and August, continuing a longtime summer tradition in Tavistock.

In addition, club members will organize a fundraising draw over the summer with the winning ticket to be drawn in September. The Optimists also plan to reach out to local businesses, community clubs and organizations to help bring the

project to completion.

Club members say community support will be essential to the project's success and encourage residents from both urban and rural areas to get involved. More details about fundraising events and donation opportunities will be shared through the club's website and in future editions of the Gazette.

SUDOKU

by PeterS 2026

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ANSWERS FOUND ON
THE CLASSIFIED PAGE

QUIZ TIME

BY JAKE GRANT

1. What is the highest mountain in Greece?
2. What is a wallaby?
3. The Tower of London is famously "guarded by" which kind of bird?
4. What human organ can regenerate itself?
5. Who won Album of the Year at the 2026 Grammy's?
6. Who did Anne Hathaway marry in 1582?
7. What three headed dog is guardian of the underworld?
8. Which illegal CIA program from the 1950s-1970s secretly experimented with mind control and psychological manipulation?
9. What does NATO stand for?
10. What does the Latin phrase *caveat emptor* translate to?

Answers found on the classified page

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Police services board report does not include EZT stats

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

Though a report on policing activities from the Oxford OPP's police services board was included in the agenda package for East-Zorra Tavistock's (EZT) council meeting Feb. 4, there was a notable absence of crime statistics from the township.

The Oxford OPP Detachment Board 2 report for the

period of October to December 2025 contains many statistics, including the number of patrol hours, and types and numbers of police calls, but it doesn't contain specific crime statistics for EZT. The board is made up of representatives from the rural townships of EZT, Blandford-Blenheim, Norwich, Southwest Oxford and Zorra, and last year replaced individual boards at each municipality.

"It provides us with a lot of information, which is good, but I would characterize most of it as generic, covering

the larger geographic mass but no real specific data specific to our municipality," said Coun. Jeremy Smith.

"There was a time not too long ago, we could easily find, through monthly reports, information specific to East Zorra-Tavistock. ... Running totals for the month and year. I'm just wondering if there's any way we can have township-specific data provided in addition to what we're seeing here?"

Mayor Phil Schaefer flipped the questions over to Coun. Matthew Gillespie, EZT's representative on the police board.

"I wasn't available to attend the last meeting. Typically, they do send out a township-specific report. I didn't see one in the last package that was circulated to me, but that data had been available. As far as I know, the information is still available individually."

Schaefer asked if Gillespie could follow up at the next police board meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 18.

Smith also asked if the board had a full quota of members.

"I believe we are still waiting for a provincial appointment, but I have heard boards going years without (one). Other than that, it is at full complement," said Gillespie.



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Tavistock-area milk truck ends up in a snow-covered field



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

This was the scene Saturday when an area milk truck missed turning onto the highway heading into Tavistock and ended up in a nearby, snow-covered farmer's field. No injuries were reported and there was minimal damage to the truck. Onlookers said it was amazing the milk truck was able to stay upright after going through the ditch, across from the entrance to Saputo. The truck barely missed a hydro pole and the "Welcome To Tavistock" sign.

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Heart transplant survivor marks 15-year milestone with donor heart

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

Tavistock's Mike Sullivan is marking a milestone few ever forget — the 15th anniversary of the heart transplant that gave him a second chance at life.

Many in the community remember Sullivan as the longtime manager of the Tavistock LCBO, a role he held for 26 years. Fewer may recall the health battle that began decades earlier, when he was diagnosed in 1995 with idiopathic dilated cardiomyopathy at University Hospital in London.

The condition weakened the muscles on the left side of his heart. His cardiologist, Dr. McNaughton, told him the only cure would be a heart transplant.

That same year, Sullivan had a defibrillator pacemaker implanted and began a demanding daily routine that included taking 26 pills. For years, he waited, unsure if a donor heart would ever become available.

In 2010, after five days of testing in London, doctors confirmed he was still strong enough to undergo transplant surgery. He and his wife, Margaret, left the hospital that day with a pager and phone, knowing the call could come at any time.

It did.

At about 1 a.m. on Feb. 10, 2011, London

Health Sciences Centre called to say a suitable heart was available and Sullivan needed to get to the hospital immediately. When he arrived, staff at reception were surprised to see a patient walking in on his own for a heart transplant — something rarely seen.

Sullivan soon learned the man in a white coat holding a clipboard was Dr. MacKenzie, the cardiac surgeon who performed the first-ever heart transplant at London Health Sciences Centre. Only 12 heart transplants were completed there that year.

As he was wheeled into the operating room, Sullivan counted more than 20 staff preparing for surgery. At 6:26 a.m., he heard Dr. MacKenzie say the helicopter was 10 minutes away with the donor heart. Those were the last words he remembers before going under.

By 3 p.m., the surgeon was updating Sullivan's family with good news; the transplant had been successful. Later that evening, they were told the new heart was functioning well and there were no signs of rejection.

The following morning, Margaret called the ICU at 6:30 a.m., expecting an update. Instead, the nurse asked if she wanted to speak to her husband. All tubes and

the ventilator had already been removed. When Sullivan said, "Good morning," Margaret and the nurse both broke down in tears of relief.

After three days in intensive care and 10 more in the cardiac recovery unit, Sullivan returned home, commuting daily to London for three months of testing to monitor for rejection.

During his recovery, he became involved with the Canadian Transplant Association, where transplant recipients from across the country connect and compete in friendly athletic events every three years. In 2016, Sullivan earned a gold medal at the Canadian Transplant Games in Toronto.

While direct contact between recipients and donor families is not permitted, Sullivan wrote a letter of thanks through Ontario's organ donation program. For seven years, he heard nothing. Then, during a follow-up appointment in London, he was handed an envelope from the donor's family. He waited to open it until he and Margaret were home.

In his final letter back, Sullivan included his 2016 gold medal. He later learned the donor's daughter carried that medal with her on her wedding day so she could feel her father's presence.

Now healthy and active, Sullivan says



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Tavistock heart transplant survivor Mike Sullivan wears a shirt reading, "Keep Calm – It's Only a Heart Transplant!" alongside his "Tin Man" mascot, which features a large red heart.

the gift of life made everything possible and hopes his story encourages others to register as organ donors.

Signing up is simple. Visit BeADonor.ca.



Mike Sullivan poses with his "go-to man," the Tin Man, at Quehl's Restaurant in Tavistock. He uses the mascot to promote organ donation, especially during February, Heart Month.

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Wellesley formalizes new agreement with agricultural society for fall fair at new recreation complex

New agreement includes use of picnic shelter at old arena for farmers' market and dairy education

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

The Wellesley-North Easthope Fall Fair will continue at the new Wellesley Recreation Complex for years to come after Wellesley council approved a new parkland licence agreement with the local agricultural society.

At its Feb. 10 meeting, council authorized the mayor and clerk to execute the agreement between the township and the Wellesley-North Easthope Agricultural Society (WNEH), formalizing use of specific township lands and buildings for fair purposes.

"When we closed down the old Wellesley Arena and Community Centre, the fair then moved their operations up to the new recreation complex," township CAO Rik Louwagie said. "They've hosted the fair there for two years now. We had an agreement with them on the old lands based on the fact that the ag. society donated most of those lands to the township – there was an ongoing arrangement – and we wanted

to bring all those rights and responsibilities over to the new complex so that the fair could continue and the ag. society could keep the rights that they previously had."

The agreement follows the closure of the former arena and community centre at 1000 Catherine St., the longtime home of the fall fair. The agricultural society had originally donated portions of those lands to the township in 1962 and 1964, with an indenture registered on title allowing the fair to operate there at no cost for as long as a community centre was maintained on the site, but for a period of no less than 20 years.

With the minimum 20-year requirement long since satisfied and the community centre now closed, township staff entered discussions with WNEH to ensure the fair could continue at the new recreation complex. A temporary arrangement allowed the fair to move in 2024, with a formal written agreement to follow.

The newly approved agreement transfers the rights formerly available at the old fairgrounds to the new site. It allows

WNEH to use the recreation complex buildings and grounds for the annual fall fair, as well as for two fundraising events and up to 12 meetings annually, all at no cost to the society.

In addition, the society will retain access to the picnic shelter at the old arena as long as it's standing there for a seasonal farmers' market and for its dairy education program.

"The farmers' market wasn't actually something that was in the previous agreement, but council had approved it several times over, so in working with (the agricultural society) on this, we felt it best just to put it right in the agreement and, if council agrees, then they don't even need to come back for that permission on an annual basis," Louwagie said.

The fall fair has been a staple in the township for 172 years, with the 2025 edition marking its 172nd year in Wellesley.

Township staff noted the municipality recognizes the importance of the event and what it brings to the community, and the new agreement continues the longstanding

no-cost arrangement in recognition of the society's past land donations and ongoing community service.

Once fully executed, township solicitors will remove the original indenture from the title of the old arena and community centre lands. The new agreement has an expiry date after 20 years, with the option to renew the agreement for additional five-year terms. After 20 years, the agreement can be cancelled by either the township or the agricultural society.

The report notes the recreation department was involved in negotiating the agreement and is satisfied with its terms, and that both parties had full legal representation in its preparation.

"It did take us a while to get there, but I think in the end, we've got a really good agreement that benefits all parties," Louwagie said.

"And that's a done deal, finally," Mayor Joe Nowak said after council voted unanimously to authorize the signing of the agreement.

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Shakespeare church bringing all ages together

DIANE DANEN

Gazette Correspondent

On Saturday, Feb. 7, Shakespeare Presbyterian Church welcomed the community to an intergenerational program

called Pancakes and Valentines with about 30 people in attendance.

The gathering focused on the theme of love, with a short message about showing kindness to others and building our lives

on love. Children and adults spent the afternoon together making Valentine cards for loved ones, colouring pictures, playing games and socializing.

Families also enjoyed making their own

pancakes and choosing from a variety of toppings, including marshmallows, chocolate chips, strawberries and raspberries. It was a fun and enjoyable afternoon for all ages.



(DIANE DANEN PHOTOS)

Adam and Thea Decaire smile as their eight-month-old son, Wesley, reaches for his brother Jack's pancake during the Pancakes and Valentines event at Shakespeare Presbyterian Church. Jack is three years old.



Heidi Scheepstra, seven, and Camilla Hart, five, enjoy colouring together.



Owen Scheepstra, five, proudly shows off his pancake creation.

Perth County council formally adopts 2026 budget

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Perth County council has formally adopted its 2026 operating and capital budget, approving a financial plan that maintains core service levels while directing new investment toward infrastructure, facilities and long-term sustainability.

The budget includes a total increase of \$2.64 million over 2025, representing an 8.75 per-cent levy increase. Based on the average 2016 MPAC-assessed household value of \$284,000, the increase amounts to approximately \$89.24 per year, or \$1.72 per week, for the average household. The increase includes 1.76 per cent attributed to growth to the county's taxbase in 2025.

Perth County Warden Dean Trentowsky said in a press release that council and staff worked carefully to balance rising costs with the need to maintain essential services and invest in the county's future.

"I would like to thank my council colleagues for their detailed review and active participation throughout this year's budget process," Trentowsky said. "Both council and staff recognize the continued financial

pressures and economic uncertainty faced by the ratepayers and their families, the farms and the business owners across Perth County. The county is doing the best it can to ensure that essential service levels are upheld in a fair and responsible manner, while continuing to invest in the future needs and opportunities for Perth County citizens."

The 2026 budget supports ongoing service delivery while advancing a number of key priorities, including 33 capital projects representing a total investment of \$9.6 million. Major infrastructure work includes the rehabilitation or replacement of four bridges and culverts, as well as the resurfacing of approximately 22 centrelane kilometres of county roads.

Facility upgrades also feature prominently in the budget, with funding allocated for renovations to the provincial-offences courtroom and county council chambers at the Perth County courthouse in Stratford. Council also approved a \$50,000 contribution toward the continued development of the Ontario Agri-Food Discovery Centre, along with funding for the creation of a new countywide economic development

and tourism wayfinding signage program.

In addition to capital and operating expenditures, the 2026 budget includes several financial measures aimed at long-term stability. Municipal drain work will be shifted to capital accounts to help smooth annual budget impacts, while additional funds will be directed to capital reserves to address infrastructure needs and reduce reliance on reserves for operational support.

The county's reserve contributions for 2026 represent 4.3 per cent of the total levy increase, a move staff say reflects a proactive approach to closing the infrastructure gap and managing costs downloaded by the province.

"I know we add only \$10 here, \$10 there to people's taxes, but in 2025, we had 62 more (ratepayers) in Perth East who cannot afford their taxes — so we're up to 380-something," said Coun. Rhonda Ehgoetz, one of Perth East's representatives on county council, prior to council's vote to adopt the 2026 budget bylaw at its Feb. 5 meeting. "I'm not sure where the other municipalities are at, but we have to keep that in mind."

"It's too easy just to keep upping and

upping and upping and not think about those people that can't afford it. People have kids and they need to eat, and you're going to feed them before you pay your taxes. So, the numbers are increasing ... and I fear it's going to get worse. I think we're going to have to buckle down here and we're going to have to start making some cuts whether we want to or not because people just can't afford it."

Ultimately, Ehgoetz along with deputy warden Sue Orr and Coun. Bob Wilhelm — both of whom represent Perth South on county council — voted against the adoption of the budget bylaw. With Coun. Doug Kellum absent at the Feb. 5 meeting, the result of the vote, weighted by population for each lower-tier municipality, was 10-6 in favour of adopting the budget.

Council was first presented with the proposed 2026 budget in December, followed by a series of detailed presentations throughout January. The final budget aligns with the county's 2023-2026 corporate strategic plan, which focuses on economic development, service effectiveness, community planning and long-term organizational sustainability.



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Region of Waterloo approves \$15 million to support Mannheim Service Area water capacity constraint

WILMOT-TAVISTOCK GAZETTE STAFF

thewtgazette@gmail.com

On Feb. 9, the day before the Region of Waterloo's sustainability, infrastructure and development committee meeting, the region approved \$15 million in regional reserve funding for a short-term solution that will help the water system cope while longer-term strategies are developed.

Regional council has approved funding to fast-track a pivotal short-term solution to address the Mannheim Service Area water capacity constraint. With this funding, the region will pilot innovative modular technology at the Mannheim water

treatment plant.

The Mannheim system uses a mix of groundwater wells and surface water from the Grand River, and the constraints are tied to both supply limits and environmental constraints on how much water can be drawn.

This funding is intended to support infrastructure work including things like upgrades to the water-filtration system and other measures to stabilize capacity as planning continues.

The plan is to implement a pilot plan that allows more water to be treated faster through containers that create a side stream at the existing facility with a goal

of adding about 25 litres per second (L/s) of water to start, followed by up to 50 L/s in the fall. When all containers are online, they could add up to 300 L/s by next year.

Adding up to 300 L/s would be a significant step forward in restoring treatment capacity at the Mannheim Water Treatment Plant to help address the water-capacity constraint. This pilot project will provide some operational resiliency and, if successful, create new capacity in the future.

"The water capacity constraint is one of the biggest challenges facing our region, and we are addressing this issue immediately," said regional chair Karen Redman in a press release. "This pilot program

shows that council is moving as fast as we can on solutions that increase capacity, protect our communities and support growth while we work on longer-term repairs and infrastructure projects in partnership with our municipal and provincial partners."

The container pilot is a bridge measure until the Mannheim water treatment plant upgrade project is complete. Both are on the list of preliminary solutions that were endorsed by council in January. Other initiatives include repairs, upgrades and new infrastructure.

Linwood Lions draw big crowd for successful Snofest celebration

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

The population of Linwood swelled on Saturday as hundreds of residents and visitors gathered at the Linwood Recreation Complex for the Lions Club's annual Snofest.

The popular winter festival, which dates back to the late 1970s, once again brought together families from across the region to enjoy a full day of outdoor and indoor activities on a bright February winter day.

Linwood Lions Club president Jenn Gregory, in her first year in the role, said she was thrilled with both the turnout and the community spirit on display. Parents, children and grandparents filled the complex throughout the day, taking part in activities designed for all ages.

The festivities began with a hearty breakfast served by local firefighters, helping set the tone for a busy day. The Linwood Lions also extended thanks to event sponsors, including Waterloo County Dairy Producers, Perth-Waterloo Egg Farmers, Mornington Communications and Schnurr's Grocery in Linwood, whose support helped make the event possible.

Snofest featured a wide variety of activities, turning the recreation complex into a hive of winter fun. Mixed teams competed in snopitch on the snow-covered ball diamond, while others took part in horse races, bingo and solo card games. Younger children enjoyed face painting and crafts hosted inside the library, giving families plenty of options to stay warm while still taking part.

One of the major highlights of the day was a performance by children's entertainer Erick Traplin of Kitchener. His high-energy show had kids dancing, laughing and singing along in the hall, drawing a large and enthusiastic crowd.

Outdoor activities remained popular despite the cold. The community ice rink, known locally as one of the best in Waterloo Region, was busy throughout the day. The rink's smooth surface was maintained by icemaker Laurence Metzger, who used a Jones Feed Mill John Deere



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

The Linwood outdoor ice rink was a hub of activity during Snofest on Saturday. From left, Declan Costello of Listowel stands with Linwood icemaker Laurence Metzger, who was preparing the rink while waiting for his daughters Sarita, seven, Zinnia, five, and Felicity, three, to finish getting their faces painted before skating.

tractor converted into a Zamboni. Skaters of all ages took to the ice, some waiting patiently for face painting before lacing up their skates.

Even with a windchill hovering around -26 degrees Celsius, snopitch players – men and women alike – continued competing in the sunshine. While sliding into bases on snow was easy, staying warm proved to be the real challenge, with participants agreeing that plenty of layers were essential.

Gregory said the strong turnout and enthusiastic participation showed just how much Snofest continues to mean to the community. After more than four decades, the event remains a winter tradition that brings people together, celebrates local volunteerism and reminds residents why Linwood's small-town spirit continues to thrive.



Members of the Linwood Lions Club at Snofest included, front row from left, Jerri Sherrer, club president Jenn Gregory, Sarah Moser, Ken Lumgair, Kara Lumgair and Tricia Dunn. Back row from left are Daniel Brubaker, Adam Harvey, Mike Kukowski and Lester Brubacher.



Despite frigid temperatures, snopitch players braved the cold and competed in mixed teams during Snofest, agreeing that warm clothing was a must.

Grace United Church congregation celebrates teamwork and Valentine's Day

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

Members of Grace United Church in Tavistock came together on Sunday to celebrate teamwork, community spirit and Valentine's Day during a service and fellowship event that blended faith, fun and friendly competition.

Led by Rev. Marilyn Arthur, choir director Marilyne Nystrom and youth coordinator Carol Young, the congregation embraced the idea of working together as a team — much like Team Canada at

the Olympics or fans rallying behind their favourite Super Bowl contenders. Many church members showed their enthusiasm by wearing jerseys and sweaters representing favourite teams from across the sports world.

Following the service, congregants gathered for coffee and refreshments and took part in a lighthearted Valentine's Day bake auction that drew strong participation and spirited bidding. The fundraiser supported future church programming while giving members a chance to socialize and enjoy homemade treats.

Bake sale treasurer Mary Boland reported the auction raised \$3,338.25, thanks to competitive bidding on dozens of baked goods. The offerings included cookies, cakes, pies and blocks of homemade cheese generously donated by the local Brenneman family.

One of the standout moments of the afternoon came when a freshly baked elderberry pie, donated by an unnamed parishioner, sparked particularly lively bidding. The pie ultimately sold for \$100, making it the highest-priced pie of the day. It was purchased by a longtime male choir

member known for his love of singing and strong support of church activities.

Church leaders said the event highlighted the strength of collaboration within the congregation, demonstrating how teamwork and shared purpose can bring people together in meaningful ways. With its mix of fellowship, fundraising and fun, the gathering served as both a celebration of Valentine's Day and a reminder of the community spirit that continues to define Grace United Church.



(EUGENE BENDER PHOTO)

Members of Grace United Church in Tavistock pose for a group photo following Sunday's service, many wearing jerseys representing their favourite sports teams, after supporting a Valentine's Day bake auction celebrating teamwork and community spirit.

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The Old Gazettes

By Sydney Grant

Slowly but surely, I'm reading through the past pages of the Tavistock Gazette (est. 1895). Within this weekly column I'd like to share with you some of my findings.

February 3-10, 2016, Edition (10 years ago)

The past two weekends saw hundreds of people joining together to raise funds in support of those living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias in Oxford County. Last Saturday morning, the 21st annual Tillsonburg Walk for Alzheimer's raised \$25,384 – the highest amount ever – while the residents of Ingersoll participated in the 18th annual Walk that same afternoon, raising over \$12,200. The largest of the three Walks took place this Saturday in Woodstock, with hundreds of participants bringing in \$84,355 for a combined Oxford County total of \$121,939.

Two synchronized skating teams from the Tavistock & District Skating Club competed at the Central Ontario Section Synchro Capers competition in Oakville this past weekend. Both teams had personal bests with the Beginner 2 team finishing second place out of 10 teams. The Pre-Novice team placed sixth out of 14 teams. Both teams will be competing at the Ontario Regional Synchronized Skating Championships Feb. 12-14 in Kingston. The Beginner 2 team is: Annabelle Hendry, Kaylee Adam, Avery Brenneman, Lindsay Vanderhyden, Tori Jantzi, Maddy Adam, Alyssa Podann, Ava P., Callie Brenneman, Reegan Ziegler, Allyson Kau, Alaina Hartman and Shelby Vanderhyden.

The students in Ms. Nancy Marenger's Grade 3 class at Tavistock Public School are learning the challenges of printing a newspaper. With the help of educational assistant Faye Ficht, the students have produced their own school newspaper. Entitled "Fancy Nancy Grade 3 Class News," the 19-page 11x17 document contains stories, photographs, sports, horoscopes, comics, an events calendar, an advice column and games.

February 1-8, 2006, Edition (20 years ago)

Two Tavistock youth will be among over 30 teenagers travelling to Europe for three months this spring as part of the Canadian Education Exchange Foundation (CEEF) program. Alex Drinkwater and Candis Seyler will take up residence in different parts of France as part of the program offered through

Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School. Both girls already hosted their exchange partners last fall here in Canada and are excited to make the trip.

Seeing their dream of the Hickson Library reopening was a satisfying moment for Brad Smith. "It's all about the kids," he said while addressing library supporters at the official ribbon-cutting ceremony on Sunday afternoon. "Don't ever tell Hickson they can't do something," he said. Nearly eight months after it was closed by the Oxford County library board, the Hickson Library is once again open for business and its model is a lesson in perseverance.

For the Tavistock Bantam Jets, fantastic defensive play and solid net-minding combined with consistent scoring were the keys to capturing the B.A.D. Girls Tournament Championship this past weekend in Aylmer. In the championship game on Feb. 5, they met the London Devilettes Black team. It wasn't until well into the second period that Carly Kowalik put the Jets on the board on a pass from Sarah Taylor. Early in the third, Sadie Williams scored from Angie Oliphant to make it 2-0. London finally beat Steph Baril late in the third to make it 2-1. Members of the team include Brooke Brenneman, Emily Sanderson, Carly Kowalik, Rachel Gingerich, Ellis Weber, Catherine Steinman, Sadie Williams, Angie Oliphant, Karli Parks, Sarah Taylor, Rebecca McKay, Steph Baril and Chelsey Campbell.

February 5-12, 1986, Edition (40 years ago)

Tavistock Public School students enjoyed their annual Winter Carnival last Friday afternoon with an eight-event cycle of activities in the school yard. Teams were made up of students from all grades and an enjoyable time was had in this non-competitive format. Events included tug-o'-war, sawing a log with an old-fashioned cross-cut saw, toboggan runs, as well as snowshoe races and relay races.

Tavistock Rotary's exchange student from Australia, Marnie Pascoe, extends a classmate's embrace to local outgoing Rotary students Pam Shantz and Kim Roth at the club's weekly dinner Monday night. Pam and Kim will travel abroad for their one-year exchange beginning this fall, but, as yet, no particular country has been selected for their term. This is the first year Tavistock will be sending two representatives in the program.

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The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette SPORTS

Masters leads Royals to consecutive playoff victories

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

Andrew Masters has Erin's number. The Tavistock goaltender stopped 52 of 55 shots in the team's regular-season finale and then turned aside all 66 shots over the weekend as the Royals jumped out to a 2-0 lead in their opening-round Ontario Elite Hockey League (OEHL) series against the Outlaws.

Tavistock went into Erin on Saturday and came away with a 3-0 win. Lucas Bast's second-period goal proved to be the game-winner before insurance markers by Mitch Atkins and Tristan Hohl. Tyler Reid chipped in with a pair of assists.

On Sunday, the Royals hosted the Outlaws and earned a 5-0 victory. Drew Gerth scored twice for the winners, while Sean Kienapple scored once and added an assist. Colin Martin and Deven Kropf added single markers.

"It was a great weekend, a great 24 hours for us, the way we bounced back. The way we played (Sunday) afternoon after a tough battle (Saturday) night was good," said Masters following Game 2.

"The guys are doing a great job clearing bodies and we aren't giving up many odd-man rushes."

The Kitchener native added he's enjoyed playing in Tavistock this season.

"There's a small-town community feel. The whole town gets behind this team and there's so much volunteer support. The



(PHOTO COURTESY OF TAVISTOCK ROYALS)

Andrew Masters (35) stopped 66 shots in a pair of shutout victories on the weekend as Tavistock took a 2-0 lead in their Ontario Elite Hockey League (OEHL) first-round playoff series with Erin.

guys have been very welcoming, and it's great to play with Mitch Atkins, one of my longtime buddies."

Masters said despite his teammates having other commitments such as work and family, he's been impressed with the attendance at practices.

Royals head coach Tyson Zehr said

his starting goalie was a huge part of the Game 1 victory.

"He was outstanding and really set the tone for the series. He made some big saves at key moments and gave our group a lot of confidence. We were outshot and Erin had pushes, but when your goalie is calm, competitive and locked in like that,

it allows the rest of the team to settle in and play the right way in front of him."

Game 2 was a more dominating performance for the Royals, something Zehr attributed to his team's pace.

"It was better right from puck drop. If you were in the building, you could feel it right away. The first 10 minutes were fast, hard, playoff hockey – physical, intense and high-paced. I thought we handled that early push well, and once we got through it, we were able to establish our game. We rolled our lines better, played more in the offensive zone, and that allowed us to wear them down as the game went on."

He added the team could be playing its best hockey of the season at just the right time.

"The biggest difference is our structure and the buy-in from everyone," Zehr said. "Guys understand their roles and are committed to playing them. Playoffs are about details, managing the puck, being hard to play against and supporting each other. Our group has really embraced that."

Zehr said while a 2-0 lead is a great start, that's all it is and they need two more wins.

"Erin is a strong team and we expect them to push back. Our focus is on staying disciplined, sticking to our game and getting better every shift."

The Royals have defeated the Outlaws in all four matchups between the teams this season. Game 3 is set for Saturday in Erin at 7:30 p.m. with Game 4 scheduled for 2:30 p.m. on Sunday in Tavistock.

PJHL Roundup: Braves knock off Navy Vets to inch closer to top spot

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

Tavistock seems to be hitting its stride at just the right time.

The Braves earned four points on the weekend with a pair of victories, including a come-from-behind thriller in Woodstock against the Doherty Division-leading Navy Vets on Saturday night.

Trailing 2-1 with nine and a half minutes left in the third, Nicholas Hamblly scored his first goal of the season on a feed from Henry Kotyk, and six and a half minutes later, Keegan Metcalf scored the game-winning goal thanks to a perfect breakaway stretch pass from Keaton Bartlett.

"It was an awesome game. I thought we played very well as a team," said Tavistock native and assistant captain Keaton Bartlett.

"We were very structured, competed very hard throughout the whole game and stuck it out and we were able to power

through," he added.

Bartlett gave Tavistock a 1-0 lead with a powerplay goal early in the second period but Woodstock scored the next two goals. Blake Richard stopped 29 of 31 shots to earn his 15th victory of the season.

The 20-year-old offensive defenceman, who was acquired from the Greater Ontario Hockey League's (GOHL) Ayr Centennials last season, gave a lot of credit to one of his coaches.

"Brody Oliver is very good at giving me confidence and encouraging me to make the plays I think I should make. He lets all the defence play offensively, which helps get shots through and offensive production."

Bartlett has 24 points in 36 games and has been finding the scoresheet consistently over the last couple of months. He explained the team's success comes from a solid locker room.

"Everyone knows each other from either past teams or friendships from school and I think that helps. We were able to bond

together quickly at the start of the season and we've been able to keep that rolling."

He added finishing as high as possible in the standings is the goal over the next three games as the postseason looms. Unfortunately, the Braves do not have another game with the Navy Vets.

"We hope to win out the rest of the way to guarantee second and just keep playing how we're playing heading into the playoffs. We should be sitting pretty good."

The Doherty Division has long been one of the Provincial Junior Hockey League's (PJHL) most competitive, and Bartlett added that every team is capable of winning on any given night – something that should help once the regular season ends.

"Every night is competitive and you can't take any nights off. We've been playing in a playoff mindset since we came back from the Christmas break. That has helped us gear up for the playoffs and hopefully, a long run."

Tavistock hosted Paris on Saturday night and earned a 5-2 win. The Braves jumped

out to a 4-0 lead by the 8:45 mark of the second period on goals from Arseneau, Brett Bell, Jacob Reid-Brant and Yann Raskin. The Titans cut the lead to 4-1 going into the third, but Even Palubeski scored to seal the victory.

The Braves have won eight straight games and trail the Navy Vets by only three points. Both teams have three games remaining.

New Hamburg dropped its third straight game in Wellesley on Saturday, falling 5-1 as Applejacks goaltender Xavier Bussiere stopped 29 of the 30 shots he faced. Owen Brown led the winners with three assists as 12 skaters found the scoresheet and the two teams combined for 92 penalty minutes. The Firebirds were blanked 4-0 in Woodstock on Friday night.

Wellesley dropped its first game of the weekend, a 4-3 loss in Norwich. Ian Speiran and Jake L'Heureux led the offence with a goal and an assist each, with Ben Morton adding a single marker.

Colourful homemade igloo brightens Brunner backyard

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

Residents in the Brunner area south of Milverton have been stopping to admire a colourful homemade igloo that has popped up along Main Street – a winter project created by the Lindner family that has quickly become a neighbourhood conversation piece.

Marie and Andrew Lindner were inspired after seeing similar ice-block igloos online and thought it would be a fun winter project for their two young children. The result is a vibrant, multicoloured structure made entirely of frozen ice blocks and built in the family's backyard.

Three-year-old Mackenzie Lindner has dubbed the structure their "penguin house," a name that seems fitting given both its icy construction and its playful purpose. His six-year-old sister, Maisie, played a key role in the project by mixing food colouring into water before freezing it into ice blocks, creating the igloo's distinctive rainbow appearance.

The family began freezing ice blocks in disposable containers on Jan. 16, taking advantage of sustained cold temperatures. They quickly learned that consistent temperatures of about -12 degrees Celsius

or colder were needed to properly freeze the blocks and allow the structure to hold together.

Once the blocks were ready, construction began on Jan. 31. The igloo was completed one week later, on Feb. 7, using approximately 200 ice blocks. Andrew Lindner said Maisie also helped make the slushy mixture used to "knit" the blocks together, a process that required dozens of pails of icy slush to ensure the structure froze solid.

Grandfather Byron Lindner, who assisted with the build, described the work as cold and hard on the hands, but well worth the effort once the final result came together.

To add to the experience, the family installed lights inside the igloo so it can be enjoyed after dark. Grandparents Byron and Sharon Lindner, along with Murray and Linda Brodhagen, were impressed by both the creativity and craftsmanship that went into the project.

The Lindners are now planning a family movie night inside the igloo, complete with hot cocoa – a way to enjoy the winter weather while giving their children a small glimpse into how people in northern regions once lived in snow shelters.



(MARIE LINDNER PHOTOS)

Mackenzie, three, and his sister Maisie, six, stand outside the colourful homemade igloo built by their family in Brunner. The multicoloured structure, made from roughly 200 ice blocks, has become a winter playhouse – or "penguin house" – like no other.

Gazette Puzzles

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The magic of magnesium

HEAPS OF HEALTHY TIPS

By Mercedes Kay Gold



"All my friends take magnesium. Should I?"

Magnesium is magical. Truly.

Magnesium is involved in over 300 chemical reactions in the body. At least 50 per cent of the population is deficient in the crucial mineral. Are you confident your body is not craving this essential electrolyte?

Everyday life requires magnesium for optimal health. Stress, whether acute or chronic, alcohol, sugar, caffeine, medication, sweating and an over-processed diet depletes the body of all-important magnesium. Symptoms are often overlooked or manifest into a long-term health concern. The good news is

many are reversible. Magnesium is an inexpensive supplement but also obtainable through diet.

Let's do a brief check, looking at a few tell-tale signs of magnesium deficiency.

Do you experience random muscle twitches? Magnesium controls neuromuscular signaling, making muscles misfire due to a shortage.

Do you suffer from painful muscle cramps? Have you ever woken up in the middle of the night with a "charley horse" — that sudden, tight, crazy painful contraction usually somewhere in the leg? Do you know anyone who has the shaky leg syndrome while sitting still? This is a strong

indicator the body requires more magnesium.

Are you constantly tired without a valid reason? The body is made of mitochondria; these are powerhouses that produce ATP or energy at a cellular level. Low energy equals low magnesium.

Do you feel anxious or lack get-up-and-go, but not sure why? Everybody has ups and downs but magnesium helps calm the mind by regulating GABA. Magnesium also activates the parasympathetic nervous system, controlling the fight-or-flight response in times of stress. Magnesium is a fast pass to serotonin, the happy hormone.

Do you suffer from poor sleep? Mega-magnesium equals serotonin, and in turn mega-melatonin for a stellar circadian rhythm. High magnesium equals a deeper sleep state, fewer awakenings and a refreshed feeling in the morning.

Do you have an irregular or fluttering heartbeat? Magnesium is an integral part of a valuable trio connected to heart health. Magnesium stabilizes heart

rhythm by balancing the dream team; calcium and potassium plus the much-needed magnesium is heart happiness.

Do you suffer from PMS? Cramps, bloating, crazy cravings and mood swings are worse without a stockpile. Magnesium works to relax muscles while regulating estrogen hormones and increasing serotonin, making the monthly cycle manageable.

Do you have high blood pressure? Magnesium is a key regulator.

Do you forget things easily? Magnesium is the answer for supporting cognitive function as the years pass.

Do you have problems managing your weight? Magnesium is central to blood-sugar control.

Have you ever felt dizzy or confused during or after physical activity? As an essential electrolyte, magnesium helps replenish fluid loss, maintaining balance.

High intensity exercising, especially in hot and humid weather, depletes the body quickly. Without sounding dramatic, restoring magnesium

can be life-saving.

As a holistic nutritionist, nutrient-dense food options are always my first stop for any health concern, especially if the diet is the Standard American Diet (SAD). SAD is processed and leads to health issues.

Choosing whole foods are imperative for feeding fuel to starved cells. Magnesium-rich foods are rooted in Mother Nature. Top sources of magnesium include cooked spinach, avocado, raw pumpkin seeds, black beans, edamame, quinoa and cashews.

It's February, Cupid's favourite month. Before spoiling yourself or a loved one with chocolate, add the gift of magnesium and choose at least 85 per-cent dark chocolate. Feel free to keep this happy holistic habit all year long. Just one ounce contains 65 milligrams of the magical mineral, magnesium.

There are reams of reasons to supplement with magnesium, but speak with your health practitioner for the dose and type of magnesium best suited to you.

What the tuck?

The Canadian Tuck: When to tuck, half-tuck, or leave it alone

DRESS SHARP. SPEND SMART.

By Scott Dunstall



Few things confuse men more than the simple question: should this shirt be tucked in?

Tuck it and you worry you look stiff or dated. Leave it out and you risk looking sloppy. Get it wrong and you land in that familiar category nobody wants to occupy — soccer dad. The truth is tucking isn't about trends. It's about proportion, purpose and context.

Once you understand those three things, the decision becomes easy. This is the Canadian approach to the tuck: practical, low drama and based on real life, not fashion theory.

The full tuck

The full tuck gets a bad reputation because it's often done badly, but when it's done right, it's still the cleanest option a man has.

A full tuck makes sense when:

1. You're wearing a proper button-up shirt. If the shirt has a traditional collar, longer tails and is meant to be worn with structure, a tuck usually improves the look. It sharpens your outline and keeps the shirt from floating around when you move.
2. You're layering with something structured. Sport coat, blazer, wool coat, even a tidy denim jacket. A tucked shirt under a structured layer looks intentional. Untucked can look unfinished.
3. The situation calls for maturity and professionalism: funerals, interviews, meetings, formal dinners and family photos. These are not moments to experiment. A clean tuck shows respect

for the setting.

How full tucks go wrong

The problem isn't the tuck. It's everything around it. If the shirt is excessively long, it will bunch and balloon when tucked. That's not a style issue. That's a fit issue. Belts matter more than men think. Thick belts and oversized buckles instantly push the look into weekend territory. Keep it simple. After tucking, raise your arms slightly. This releases tension and gives the shirt some natural drape. The goal is neat, not tight.

The half tuck

The half-tuck works because it sits between effort and ease. It's not sloppy and it's not formal. It simply adds shape.

Half-tucks are best when:

1. The shirt is casual and slightly boxy: Oxford shirts, casual button-ups, flannels, heavier cotton shirts. These often benefit from just a bit of structure.
2. You want definition without formality. If you're heading out casually but don't want to look thrown together, the half-tuck is a smart compromise.
3. You're wearing a jacket but keeping it relaxed. With casual outerwear, a half-tuck

prevents the outfit from looking shapeless.

Half-tuck rules that matter

Keep it subtle. One small section at the front is enough. Pick a side and stick to it. Random tucking looks messy, not effortless. Even if the belt isn't visible, wear one. The waistband area should still look finished.

The no-tuck

Untucked doesn't mean careless; it means appropriate.

Leave the shirt untucked when:

1. The hem is shorter or straight. Shirts designed to be worn out usually end around mid-fly. Tucking these often makes them look awkward.
2. You're wearing knitwear or casual tops: sweaters, hoodies, sweatshirts and most polos should not be tucked. They're built to sit cleanly on their own.
3. You're wearing overshirts or shackets. These are outer layers. They're meant to drape, not tuck.

Avoiding the "gave up" look

Length matters more than brand. If the shirt hangs too low, it will always look off untucked.

Pants have to do their part. Untucked shirts only work when

jeans or chinos fit properly. Baggy pants plus an untucked shirt rarely looks intentional.

Having said all of that, here is a quick thumbnail guide:

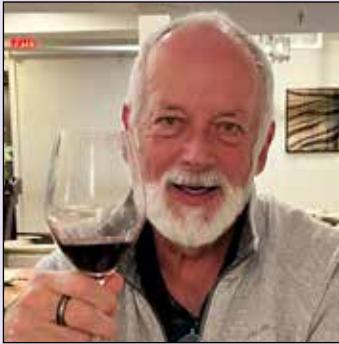
- Button-up shirt plus adult occasion: tuck it.
- Casual button-up and you want shape: half-tuck.
- T-shirts, sweaters, casual polos, overshirts: leave it out.

That's the Canadian tuck. Sensible. Comfortable. Betcha didn't think I could write a whole article about tucking in your shirt?

Scott Dunstall has been on a stylistic journey for over 10 years. His belief is that every guy has a style of their own. When it's discovered, it empowers and builds confidence. Scott has appeared several times on Rogers TV Kitchener as a guest on DAYTIME. His writing has been republished by LinkedIn Top Influencer and INC. Magazine contributing editor, Jeff Haden. He has also written several pieces for the Baden Outlook. You can follow Scott on Instagram @everydaystylebyscott or on LinkedIn @scottdunstall or Life & Style Wilmot on Facebook. Feel free to ask questions or propose collaborations: everydaystylebyscott1@gmail.com.

Two lesser-known features of Lyon, France

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO



By Paul Knowles

There are plenty of reasons to enjoy a visit to the French city of Lyon. It's the third-largest city in France, known for its unique "Bouchon" gastronomy, for its history dating back to Roman times and before, and for its once-important role as a centre of the silk trade.

All of these things are still in evidence today, but I found two other features of Lyon to be equally fascinating — the incredible mosaic murals in the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourviere and the historic importance of Lyon as a centre of the French Resistance in World War II.

We were in Lyon as a stop on our Viking Rhone River Cruise; Lyon sits at the junction of the Rhone and Saone rivers. Our walking tour showed us a bustling city with a deep and rich history.

But when we visited the Basilica, I was tempted to skip the rest of the tour and simply stay and savour the incredible mosaics that line the walls. They're not ancient; the gilded mosaics were created from 1872 all the way up to 1964. There are six mosaics covering a vast, 6,000 square metres and portraying two overarching themes arising from the life of Mary the mother of Jesus: Mary and the Church, and Mary and the History of France.

The Basilica itself is awe-inspiring. Like its mosaics, the building is not ancient; it

was completed in 1896. But it is magnificent.

That cannot be said for the narrow passageways between buildings that honeycomb the old part of Lyon. As our group wandered through some of these passageways, we found little to be impressed with until we heard two stories told by historian Boris Klein, who presented a lecture onboard our Viking longship. His talk was entitled "Lyon and the Resistance," and the first thing I learned was those impressive hidden passageways were, in fact, absolutely vital to the underground resistance to the Nazis.

Why? The key reason was a feature we had spotted on our tour; inside these covered passageways were what we would call community mail boxes today. In the days of the Underground, they were perfect drop boxes for clandestine communication. Hidden from view of the streets or anything overhead, they were an ideal place for a member of the Resistance to leave a message to be collected in secret by a colleague at a later time.

Klein gave us a thumbnail sketch of the circumstances that created the French Resistance. Though in 1939, the French were believed to have the best army in the world, clever German strategy saw France completely conquered in a mere 42 days. The Germans divided France into several parts. Alsace and Moselle were declared to be part of Germany. Northern France was occupied by the Germans; the south, including Lyon, were initially occupied but then became the "Free Zone" or "Vichy Zone" under Marshall Pétain, a First World War hero who, by the time of the occupation, had become a collaborator with the Nazi regime.

The French Resistance arose in opposition to the Nazis and their puppets, and Lyon became the centre of the Resistance. And yes, those mailboxes and enclosed passages played a role, but there were lots of other factors too.

Lyon is located relatively close to Switzerland, a neutral country. Lyon was a centre for trade unions, who joined with anti-Nazi political and religious organizations to oppose the Vichy regime. A common cause united unusual allies: "Jews, Catholic priests, communists, patriots all sat at the same table," said Klein. Of course, they

could not operate openly — Pétain had set up a French militia that was essentially an arm of the Gestapo.

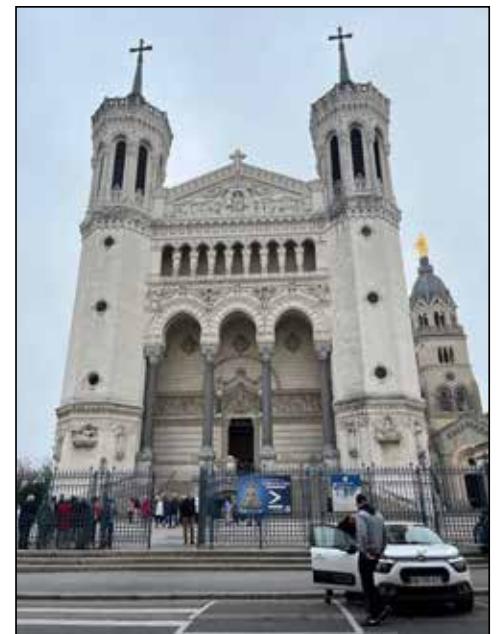
So, opposition to the Nazis went underground — or more precisely in Lyon, into the multitude of passageways throughout the old city. By the end of 1940, Lyon was recognized as the centre of the French Resistance.

According to Klein, the Resistance produced anti-Nazi leaflets, provided Jews and others who needed such with fake ID papers, printed underground newspapers and organized clandestine meetings.

Charles DeGaulle, who was leading the fight against the Nazis from exile in England, sent a man named Jean Moulin to Lyon, where he played the key role in uniting the Resistance as "The Secret Army." Moulin was eventually captured and tortured to death in 1943. By then, Germany had taken over direct control of the south of France, but at the same time, the Secret Army had taken a more active role in guerrilla-style warfare against the occupiers.

On Sept. 3, 1944, Lyon was liberated by Allied forces.

The story of the Resistance movement is in certainly heroic, but Klein noted that after the fact, DeGaulle created a less-than-accurate myth. He told the people of France, "You are a great people who never accepted defeat." In fact, said Klein, a great many French people accepted the presence of the German occupiers and frequently collaborated with them. Perhaps the most shocking example is that the Vi-



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

Lyon's Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourviere, home to 6,000 square metres of gilded mosaics.

chy police — French officers, not German — sent 75,000 Jews to die in concentration camps.

Klein noted that only in the 1970s or '80s did it become possible to discuss the complicated reality of the Nazi occupation of France.

Paul Knowles is an author and travel writer, and past president of the Travel Media Association of Canada. To contact Paul about travel, his books, or speaking engagements, email pknowles@golden.net.



A mosaic commemorating Joan of Arc.

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The truth about today's local real estate market

EXPERT REAL ESTATE ADVICE



By Isabel Livingston

If you have been listening to conversations about the real estate market, you've probably noticed one thing; everyone has an opinion. From local chatter to social-media headlines, what is happening in the market is often described in extremes.

The national headlines paint a broad picture but taking a local snapshot of what's going on tells a much more specific story. Let's get into what is actually happening

in the local market, without all the noise.

The market has shifted but not to the extremes headlines portray – the market isn't crashing, it's simply correcting from the extremes we saw a few years ago. Buyers haven't disappeared; they have just become more cautious and selective, prioritizing value over speed. When we look at month over month statistics for Wilmot Township, for example, the average sale price was actually up 1.6 per cent in January 2026 in comparison to January 2025, and in Wellesley/Woolwich, up 21.5 per cent – both for single family homes.

For sellers, this simply means strategy matters more than ever. The market is no longer forgiving of overpricing or minimal preparation. Being in line with current market patterns is where sellers are reaping the reward. Homes that are seen sitting longer are typically anchored to benchmarks from previous years. For sellers, a strong understanding and focus on what the current market is showing is the biggest strength to carry.

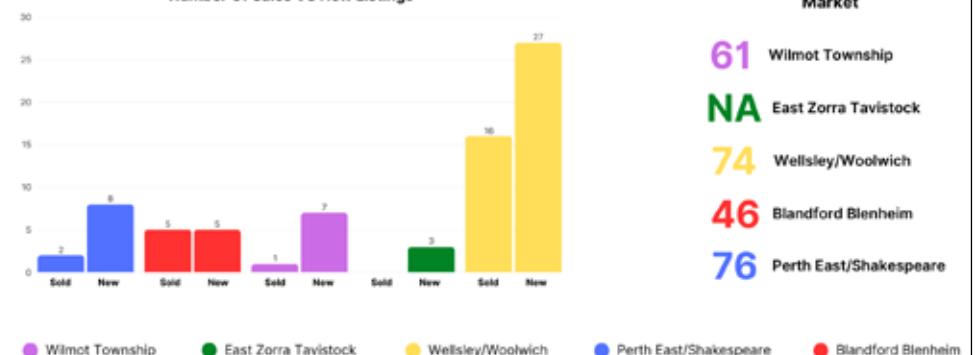
Pricing in today's local market is better described as steady rather than dramatic. Following a period of rapid growth, prices are finding a more sustainable pace that aligns with correction towards more "normal" market conditions. While some

JANUARY REAL ESTATE STATS

INFORMATION GATHERED FROM ITSO CORNERSTONE

| Average Sale Price |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| \$809,000 | \$0 | \$1,238,103 | \$568,500 | \$715,000 |

Number Of Sales VS New Listings



Average Days On Market

Area	Average Days On Market
Wilmot Township	61
East Zorra Tavistock	NA
Wellesley/Woolwich	74
Blandford Blenheim	46
Perth East/Shakespeare	76

segments are softening, this is a dramatic crash. Well located and maintained homes still continue to hold their value. Accurate pricing based on current data is proving to be the most reliable path toward a successful sale.

The overall pattern in today's market points towards a more balanced market that is favouring buyers, depending on the specific area. Inventory levels month over month aren't grossly extreme – Wilmot Township is sitting at about 1.6 months of inventory and Wellesley/Woolwich at about 2.2 months.

Today's local real estate market isn't stalled, it's adjusting. Buyers are more cautious, sellers need a stronger plan, prices are stabilizing and patterns are normalizing. For those making decisions based on lifestyle changes rather than headlines, the market continues to offer opportunities.

For questions or article suggestions, reach out! 226-232-4236 or isabel.livingston@century21.ca.

Isabel Livingston is a sales representative with Century 21 Heritage House Ltd., Brokerage.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR: Wilmot councillors' buzzword

The Editor,

The "buzzword" heard in the Wilmot council chamber during the 2026 Strong Mayor's budget process was, "Transparency!"

Coun. Cressman said, "I'm lamenting the fact that we don't have the pieces of information that I think we all want."

Coun. Dunstall said, "one of the things that came through loud and clear last year during our budget process was that our constituents didn't trust us ... but it's very clear to me with last year and again with this year that transparency is key, and my question would be ... would there be a possibility to have those line by lines you have obviously worked on?"

A councillor asked about the 10-year capital plan that was posted on the website. The CAO's response was, "Frankly, in my opinion, did not warrant being published with this document," and eventually, "I don't think it's necessary for the public to see."

The general ledger ("line by lines") is the comprehensive spreadsheet accounting of a municipality's finances. Coun. Cressman asked that it be available to council and taxpayers. The CAO's response was, "Releasing the entire general ledger (to) the public is something we had concerns about."

Councillors did try to get transparency, and their questions discovered that:

- The mayor's proposed budget did not balance the day it was proposed on Jan. 9. Oops. She added \$5,514,020 to revenue on Jan. 29.

- The capital budget was in deficit by \$2,176,040 when posted. Oops. She removed a fire truck costed at \$2,600,000.

- The capital budget was now in surplus by \$423,960. Oops. We forgot to include two to three capital request forms (six actually). When submitted, the six requests totalled \$669,960, or \$246,000 in deficit again.

- A request for five trucks totalling \$831,000 placed four trucks on the capital list, but \$26,000 was missing. Oh, we made a mistake, the price of one truck has now been accounted for as costing \$26,000 less.

- Four trucks were costed on the capital list, but one truck costing \$195,000 was placed in the operating budget.

- Six requests that required outside consultants, described as "Studies and Other," totalling \$1,043,505 were not charged against the departments' operations budget, but were charged to capital. Hopefully the newly hired certified professional accountant will realign these apparent discrepancies.

Hired staff remained firm and resisted making cuts in capital or operating budgets as proposed by the mayor. Not even a

Continued on page 25

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Continued from page 24

new \$80,000 pickup truck. Any reductions in the tax levy (7.9 > 7.1 per cent) resulted from cuts made by councillors within their own council department budget.

With the Strong Mayor's arbitrary time clock ticking down, council ran out of time to make further cuts. They tried their best and will return to it after they get the documents that they needed and wanted now.

Coun. Dunstall is assuming the role of president of the New Hamburg Board of Trade, and it's rumoured that she will not

be seeking a second term. In my opinion, that's a gain for the board of trade and a loss to Wilmot council. Lillianne has displayed a good grasp of the information and an analytical grasp on complicated financial and legislative data that is quite often contradictory from different sources. She has offered suggestions that she believed would make Wilmot a better place in which to live.

The good news, though, is that Ward 4 voters may have time between now and Oct. 26 to seek out and encourage potential

candidates for the two New Hamburg seats; people who have an ability to read and understand complex information and supporting numerical data. People who can analyze data, separate the chaff from the wheat, synthesize new understandings and alternatives, ask probing questions seeking clarity and transparency, and comprehensively communicate their observations.

It is my opinion that the Strong Mayor's Budget Powers have not achieved their purpose, as stated by Doug Ford. The purpose was to build 1.5 million additional

housing units in 10 years.

"Transparency" is just a buzzword in Wilmot. I await a transparent, direct correlation between this strong mayor's budget and the construction of a single additional housing unit in Wilmot. This process failed to produce! Municipalities need leadership that demonstrates less hubris and more humility. Fulsome transparency is a starting point!

Respectfully submitted,

Barry Wolfe, Baden

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For more information call at 519-655-2992
*Tavistock Memorial Legion
223 Hope Street West Tavistock*

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18

East Zorra-Tavistock Council meeting
7 p.m.
*Council Chambers
89 Loveys Street East, Hickson*

Perth East council meeting
7 p.m.
*Council chambers
25 Mill Street East, Milverton*

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19

All-You-Can-Eat Spaghetti Dinner in support of Carter Kuchma
4:30 - 6:30 p.m.
Hosted by Sprucedale Parent Council and Quchl's Restaurant with all proceeds going to the Kuchma family. Tickets must be purchased in advance at Sprucedale Public School
*Shakespeare Optimist Hall
3976 Galt St., Shakespeare*

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23

Wilmot Council meeting
7-10 p.m.
*Council chambers
60 Snyder's Road W., Baden*

FRIDAY, MARCH 6

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER
2 p.m.
Service prepared by WDP committee of Nigeria "I will give your rest: come"
*Hillcrest Mennonite Church,
1056 Huron St. New Hamburg*

TUESDAY, MARCH 10

Wellesley Council meeting
6:45 p.m.
*Council chambers
4805 William Hastings Line, Crosshill*

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18

Community Care Concepts Lunch and Fellowship
12 p.m.
Please register by Mar 13 by calling 519-664-1900 or Toll Free: 1-855-664-1900.
*Wilmot Rec Complex,
1291 Nafziger Rd, Baden*

SATURDAY, MARCH 21

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*St. Mary's Catholic High School,
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TUESDAY, MARCH 24

"LIFE WORTH LIVING"
7 p.m.
The one-hour film was produced by Woodstock native, Alex Schadenberg, Executive Director of Euthanasia Prevention Coalition and will be followed by a Q & A session with Alex. Admission is free. For more information, please email info@oxfordcountyrighttolife.com
*Woodstock Polish Hall,
878 Dufferin Street, Woodstock*

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Crokinole Monday, Wednesday morning 8:30 a.m. - 12 p.m., Just drop in to play, good to bring someone. Contact: John Schultz 519-655-2346

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- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Mount Olympus | 7. Cerberus |
| 2. A kangaroo | 8. MKUltra |
| 3. Ravens | 9. North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| 4. The liver | 10. Buyer beware |
| 5. Bad Bunny | |
| 6. William Shakespeare | |



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