

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Balanced Budget

By Chris Ballard, MPP
Newmarket-Aurora

Last week, the government of Ontario passed the Stronger, Healthier Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2017. This budget included significant investments in education and health care, including free prescription medications for everyone aged 24 and under through OHIP+: Children and Youth Pharmacare, starting in January 2018.

I know this budget will help many people not just in Newmarket-Aurora, but also across the province. It will strengthen Ontario's economy by investing in people, communities and businesses. Health care funding is being increased by \$11.5 billion over three years to reduce wait times, improve access to care and enhance the experience and recovery of patients.

Southlake Regional Health Centre will receive an additional \$5,746,684 of funding this year taking our contribution to the Southlake's operating budget to \$284,398,584 in 2017-18. The provincial budget is also supporting families by investing an additional \$6.4 billion over three years to help learners reach their full potential by supporting them from full-day kindergarten to postsecondary education and beyond.

In addition to these investments, the budget also includes, 100,000 more children access affordable, quality licensed child care, including 24,000 in 2017-18, launching a new Career Kick-Start Strategy to create 40,000 new work-related opportunities for students and recent graduates, lowering and household electricity bills by 25 per cent, on average, making housing more affordable for homebuyers and renters through Ontario's Fair Housing Plan.

Ontario's Fair Housing Plan

Last week the Rental Fairness Act, 2017 was passed with unanimous support in the house. The new Act expands rent control to all private rental units, including those occupied on or after November 1, 1991.

Effective April 20, 2017, landlords cannot raise rents more than the rent increase guideline set by the government. In 2017 it was 1.5 per cent. Any rent increase notices above this amount given on or after April 20 must be reduced to 1.5 per cent. I have heard from people across Ontario who have had to deal with unfair increases in the past couple of years. This new guideline means that now they will know how much their rent can increase per year and it will be fair and predictable.

The legislation also introduced additional protections for tenants, including, a standard lease to help both tenants and landlords know their rights and responsibilities, protection for tenants from eviction due to abuse of the 'landlord's own use' provision, ensuring landlords can't pursue former tenants for unauthorized charges, prohibiting above-guideline rent increases in buildings where elevator maintenance orders have not been addressed and removing above-guideline rent increases for utilities, to protect tenants from carbon costs and encourage landlords to make their buildings more energy efficient.

Ontario Municipal Board

In the coming weeks, the province will introduce new legislation to create the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, which would, if passed, replace the Ontario Municipal Board.

The new tribunal will ensure that development and growth happen in a way that is beneficial for the municipality, Ontario and our shared future. The tribunal will be able to give greater weight to the decisions of local communities and would also make planning appeals more accessible to the public by creating the Local Planning Appeal Support Centre - a new agency that would provide free information and support for the public. The changes were proposed after extensive public consultations, including an open house in this riding and with input from both Aurora and Newmarket councils.

OMB reform is a topic close to my heart, given my years on Town Council. I spoke extensively with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and his predecessor and at caucus on the need for reform. The government received more than 1,100 written submissions and held 12 town hall meetings across the province that were attended by more than 700 people. Our community has been critical of the planning process and OMB and I believe you will find our major issues reflected in the changes. It's further proof this government is listening to its citizens.

Nurses Week

On May 12, I served ice cream to nurses and staff at Southlake Regional Health Centre in celebration of the amazing nurses we have at this hospital, and those living and working in our community. Each of us has been touched by a nurse in some way and serving ice cream was a symbolic way of saying 'thank you.'

I have met so many nurses who go above and beyond to help patients and their families. May 12 is a very significant day for nurses across the country.

In 1971 the International Council of Nurses, designated it as International Nurses Day because it was Florence Nightingale's birthday, the founder of professional nursing. I want to thank the nurses at Southlake and across our community and the province for their hard work and dedication. I recognize that nursing is not an easy job.

Windfall Ecology Centre

Last week, I had the honour of acknowledging the great work being done by Windfall Ecology in Aurora on their ClimateWise Business Network, and to announce funding. Windfall is helping to fight climate change in our community by supporting initiatives that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and boost energy efficiency.

Through the ClimateWise program they have engaged almost 6,500 members of the York Region business community in reducing their carbon emissions. Windfall helps business members develop a credible business case for sustainability and then works with them to quantify their sources of Greenhouse Gas emissions, identify mitigation priorities, and establish emission reduction targets. As always, I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.