

## Budget puts people's health, economy first: MPP

The Ontario Government unveiled its second COVID-19-related budget last week.

Tailored to our present circumstances, the Budget is based on the principle presented by Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy that, "you can't have a healthy economy without healthy people."

"For the past year, we have been focused on protecting people from COVID-19," he said. "Many challenges lie ahead. But with vaccines being distributed in every corner of the Province, hope is on the horizon. We are ready to finish the job we started one year ago."

The budget includes \$16.3 billion towards health initiatives, as well as \$23.3 billion in investments to protect the economy. The new COVID-19 action plan now totals \$51 billion.

Among the highlights of the budget with a direct impact on the Town of Aurora include a new Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit for the year ahead which would provide up to \$2,000 per recipient for 50 per cent of eligible expenses, a program estimated to reach 230,000 people this year; a third round of payments to support parents through the COVID-19 Child Benefit, which will be doubled to \$400 per child this time around (\$500 for each child with special needs); and a further round of funding for small business through the Ontario Small Business Support Program, which will see an estimated 120,000 small businesses automatically benefit from an additional \$1.7 billion in relief.

The Budget also includes a number of measures to improve long-term care (LTC) across Ontario.

Through these initiatives, \$933 million will be invested over four years to support the building of 30,000 new LTC beds and a further \$246 million over the next four years to improve conditions at existing residences.

An additional \$650 million will be coming to protect vulnerable populations in these living settings from COVID-19, while a further \$4.9 billion will be invested over four years to increase direct daily care in LTC to four hours a day, hiring more than 27,000 new positions in the process.

"The hard work and sacrifice of the people of Newmarket and Aurora will help us reach the day when the pandemic is behind us," said Newmarket-Aurora MPP Christine Elliott in a statement. "Our government will continue to be there every step of the way to protect the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and our communities. Working together, we will rebuild and recover so that Ontario is a stronger province and a place we are all proud to call home."

Speaking to The Auroran, Aurora-Oak-Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa said the Government made it "will do whatever it takes to protect people's health" while also protecting the economy.

"We made it pretty clear in this budget we will do whatever it takes to protect people's health and, as we move towards recovery, we need to be mindful of our economy as well and make sure our businesses are supported," he said. "I look at all the investments in health care and in contact tracing, for example, vaccination in our hospitals, our health care providers, but also our businesses. That is huge. I'm in touch with a lot of small business owners locally and they felt it. They felt it has been a tough time for them and doing the Small Business Support Grant again, that is going to be a big support for them."

"My riding is one [where] we have a lot of small businesses, a lot of mid-sized businesses. I will be making sure the supports are coming fast. We want to get the Budget passed so we get the supports going to people as quickly as possible, but also the families. The support they will be getting, whether it is the \$400 cheque or whether there is more support for child care support now, that is going to provide a great deal of support for families, especially women who are going to return back to the workforce again."

Beyond the budget, Mr. Parsa said there are many areas he will continue to advocate for at Queen's Park but for the time being the lens is on making sure that people's health is our priority right now.?

?We need to make sure we do everything we can to vaccinate as many people as possible, make sure we get our economy moving again, and support and invest in our infrastructure is going to be important for us. The investment of our subway coming into Richmond Hill is going to be huge. It is going to be a game-changer for a lot of our residents and businesses and that is something I am going to continue advocating for.?

**By Brock Weir** Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter