

**Presentation at the Tay Valley Gala to celebrate and thank Volunteers
Thursday, November 29, 2018 Councillor Jennifer Dickson**

It's so good to share this, my last official commitment to Tay Valley Council, with you... citizens, guests, current and former staff, current and even some future councillors... together you represent the commitment and creativity and generosity that makes our home here such a treasure.

In one way or another, we're all volunteers here this evening. We all know that it's not just about 'getting the project done'. It's understanding, fostering and nurturing something from the ground up. And this requires our patience and discipline, not to mention enthusiasm and determination.

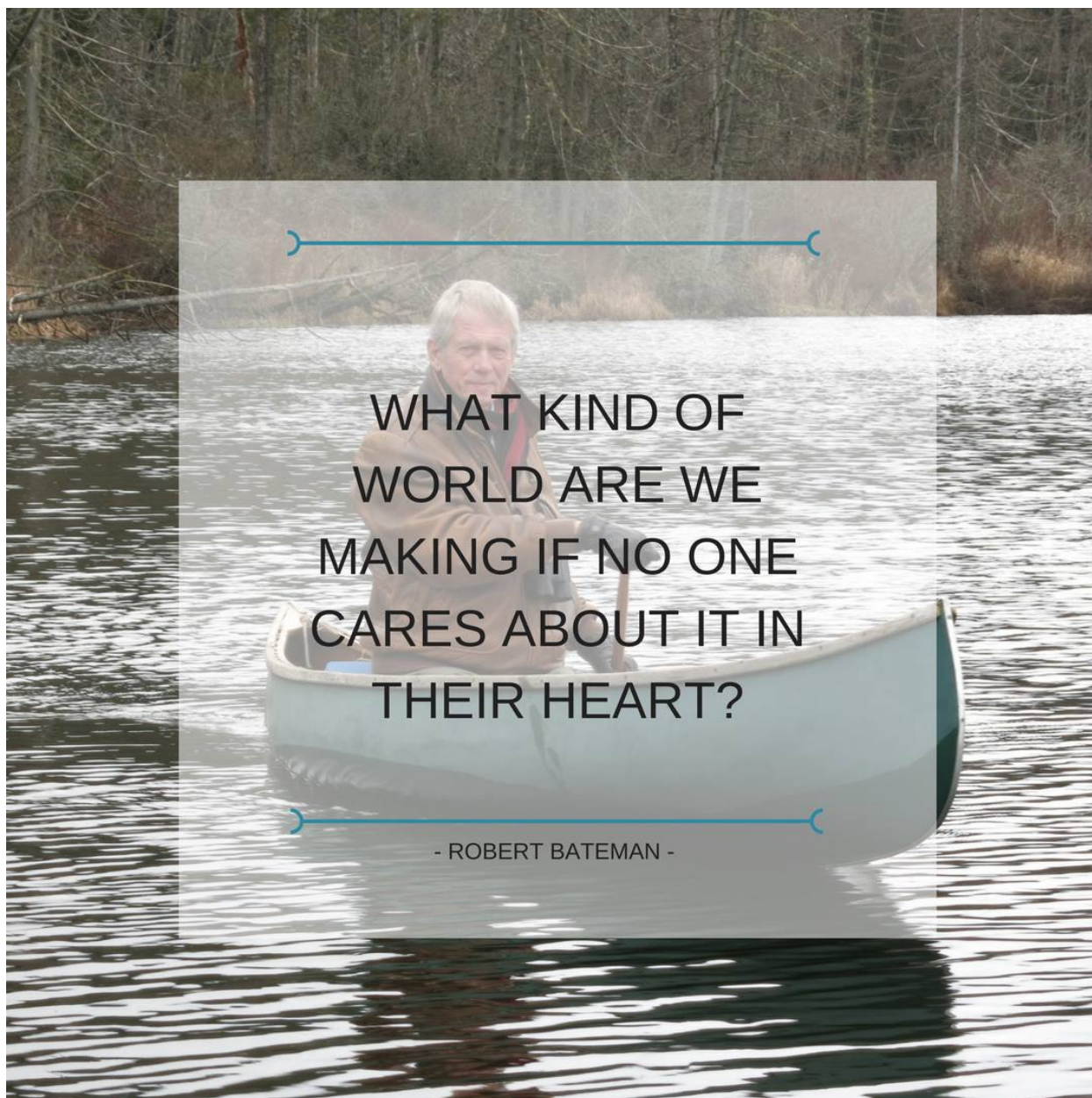
When we get frustrated, that's... an invitation and opportunity to examine our motivations, our actions, and their consequences. And experience shows us that when we stay on guard and keep moving forward in whatever small ways we can, breakthroughs do occur.

SO... thank you for asking me to make a few predictions. I'll make just three, to be precise – supporting our natural environment, strengthening our broadband capacity and using the fast changing social media technologies to all our advantage...

As we begin our next four years here, whether as a member of staff, as a resident, as a returning councillor, as a new councillor, Deputy Reeve or Reeve, we are all experiencing our planet metaphorically shrinking in size and the issue of the environmental impact of our activities grows increasingly critical. All of us will be even more directly affected and our individual actions will become crucial. 2019 will, I predict, be an important and pivotal year, and demand nothing less than our fullest and most conscious participation.

Climate change impacts are accelerating rapidly; our lakes, rivers, wetlands and forests are being challenged, and some governments are retreating just when we need more action to provide industry with certainty while ensuring our land, air, and water is protected.... This from the 2018 Environmental Protection Report.

Well over half the world's population of vertebrates, from fish to birds to mammals, have been wiped out in the past four decades, says a brand new report just out from the World Wildlife Fund.



Protecting forests, wetlands and coastal areas to preserve wildlife can also have a side benefit, as those types of ecosystems also store carbon and prevent it from being released into the atmosphere.

In September, in the latest round of environment cutbacks, the new Ontario government tabled legislation to repeal the Green Energy Act, a nine year old law that aimed to kickstart the province's clean energy industry.

Again in September, the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario released the 2018 Greenhouse Gas Progress Report, [Climate Action in Ontario: What's Next?](#), to the Ontario Legislature. That report calls on the provincial government to create a climate change law that drives down emissions while funding sensible solutions. A meaningful

climate law needs science-based emissions budgets, a legal obligation to stay within those budgets, and credible, transparent progress reporting. I predict that environmental protection will be a first priority and be even more important for all of us stay informed and active on this growing challenge.



Why do we care, here in our 'safe' Tay Valley? Lyme disease, Zebra mussels, floods, drought, the noxious weed Wild Parsnip,..... blue algae, effluent in our lakes, unprotected wetlands; a growing lack of native trees and other indigenous species along our shoreline properties...

It's time that we as committed citizens take note: One-size-fits-all rural policies won't support families and protect our forests, lakes and air. Some of what is thought by others to be 'known' about Tay Valley is just wrong...

Ontario is simultaneously a big province and very small one: it's geographically larger than most countries, but most of the actual people live within a reasonable commute of Toronto, Ottawa, and a handful of other large cities. That leaves vast areas of the province — the north, certainly, but also large parts of the south — with a pronounced sense of rural alienation.

Rural communities looking to strengthen our economies — either to attract new families or simply to properly support the ones we have — face daunting challenges. We don't

have the wealth that cities can tap into to provide services and amenities that city-dwellers take for granted, which means we have to rely on our province - whose support is often conditional and inconsistent.

But beyond all that, there's a more fundamental problem: a lot of what others 'know' about us here in rural Ontario is just wrong.

For starters, according to the Rural Ontario Institute, the province's rural population isn't actually shrinking, in absolute terms. Rural communities aren't growing as fast as big cities are by any means, but the statistical fact of rural Ontario 'losing population' has as much to do with definitions as demography. The city of Belleville, for example, grew large enough to become its own census metropolitan area in 2016, and so while little changed in the day-to-day lives of people in eastern Ontario, the region 'lost' rural residents.

Then there's what rural Ontario actually does. If you ask officials in the provincial government, they'll tell you that rural policy is tucked into the larger ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs. Rural policy is farm policy, and farm policy is rural policy.

Except (again, according to the Rural Ontario Institute) most families in rural Ontario aren't farmers, and that's been true for half a century. Farmland is the most visible use, when you're travelling through the countryside. It's still a significant and important sector, of course, certainly, but it's been a tough perception to shake.

But even if we clear up such misunderstandings about rural Ontario, we're still facing the question of what, exactly, our governments might do to help us thrive. Do we focus on tourism? Saving historic locations, waterways, buildings, trees? Indigenous history, artifacts and culture?

What about improving internet capacity for our growing number of home businesses, our schools, our young people, our senior residents?

One big priority for our area is broadband internet access: while most of our community has access to minimal broadband now, many households that can't get connections better than 5Mbps (what the CRTC considers a minimal level of service) are overwhelmingly concentrated in rural areas like ours.

More broadly, it's practically a cliché that policies made in Toronto tend not to take the realities of rural life into account.

The province tries to apply policies neutrally across all of Ontario, but even then, failures can be messy: the fight last year over rural school closures was just one example of policies that were hurting rural communities such as Tay Valley. Instead of trying to apply policies related to, say, school funding or infrastructure spending 'equally' across Ontario, our Provincial Government might instead take place-based policies more seriously.

So yes, staff and new councillors, please attend and participate in federal and provincial conferences – do set up meetings with relevant Ministers and their staffs, do arrive prepared, do keep reminding them to take Tay Valley seriously. If we want to be sure of our objectives, we have to ask the right questions.

OK – as promised, I've mentioned environmental integrity, touched on broad band capacity, and broader advocacy with other levels of government. Here's my last prediction:

Social media for our municipality – According to Jacqueline Demers (@RedbrickComms), by 2017, 81% of Ontario municipalities were on social media, but only 8% used more than website and Facebook... I predict, and strongly support Tay Valley Township to consider engagement in live streaming or at least audio recorded meetings, perhaps look into Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn... and strengthen our website, Facebook, email, the telephone, the written word, radio...

Yes, there are potential Inherent Risks:

Negative comments, mistakes, privacy and confidentiality challenges, hacked accounts, internet 'trolls'...these must be dealt with.

But there are also Important and Consequential Rewards:

We can build relationships, listen to citizens, be proactive with communications, address topics of concern, provide timely facts and updates, change corporate culture to be much more positive.

Why? Who cares? *We must care*. News travels in real time. And the big one we all learned in spades over the last four years - Speed trumps accuracy.

While we're busy considering and approving text, audiences 'consume content.'

In my view these challenges must be met, or we as citizens will be left (as we were in several instances recently) with insufficient, late, inappropriate and perhaps even no information. As media communications change, our township must remain true to the foundation upon which the citizens of Tay Valley depend – it must be Strong.

Transparent. Answerable. Decent.

What Do We Have a Government for?

Getting rid of government regulations is one of the cornerstones of the new Ford administration in Queens Park— And of course the idea of streamlining government always sounds good, as it is often a challenge to comply with various regulations.

But for just one example, the unprecedented and unforeseen floods last spring right here in Tay Valley put these in a different light. Years ago officials were under pressure to be 'development-friendly', so buildings and even roads were erected too close to high water lines. We're still spending many taxpayer dollars responding to that. Regulatory failure can and does make climate unpredictability much more consequential for all.

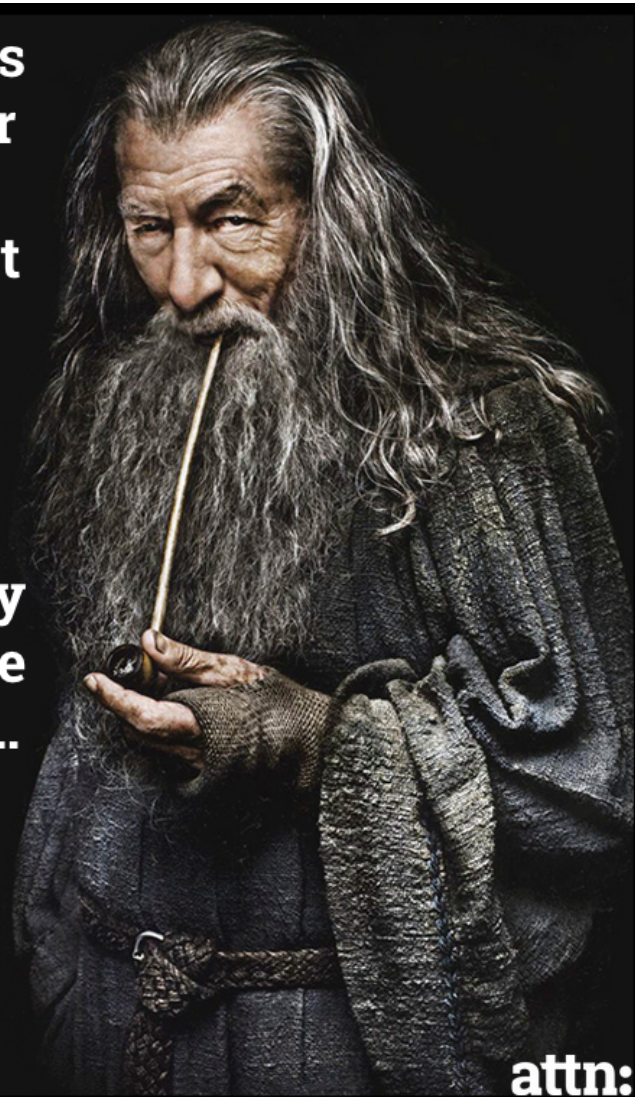
I wish we could agree to make the debate about regulation less ideological. There are good rules and there are bad ones. Governments aren't all-knowing and markets aren't flawlessly self-regulating. Over- and under-regulation are both real problems. This is common sense to most of us and shouldn't descend into a stereotyped left-right debate.

There are some things that will work out if you just let the free markets take care of themselves like, um, popular music. But there are others that won't. And their number is legion, from building safety to ... health care.

Rules are good only if they are sensible, affordable — and enforced. Let me point out that good enforcement requires government funding, and that often simply isn't there. So when senior governments download responsibilities to our municipality, but don't provide any resources to implement let alone enforce them, that requires us to raise taxes in our tiny municipality, often a challenging (if not impossible) task in the current conservative climate.

**Some believe it is
only great power
that can hold
evil in check, but
that is not what
I have found.
I found it is the
small everyday
deeds of ordinary
folk that keep the
darkness at bay...
small acts
of kindness
and love.**

- Gandalf



attn:

This evening, we've been celebrating your achievements and enjoying our relationships and sharing this delicious dinner. But as we all know, 2014 to 2018 has also been challenging here in Tay Valley. Let me express with many others the strongest possible support for future success among our excellent Tay Valley staff, new Tay Valley council, and all you wonderful Tay Valley volunteers.

Please, please stay involved. Every single time an interested, informed citizen approaches our municipal staff and councillors, every time you attend a meeting, ask for information, express your opinion – opposition or support, that has an effect.

Use, volunteer at and take your families in to Perth, to our library, our swimming pool, our Conlon Farm, our skating rink – yes OUR – these resources are part of the reason seniors, young families, small business owners, musicians, artists, continue to want to live here... and there are always folks who want to diminish Tay Valley support for these.

When you hear or read something on the news media, do your own fact checking... it's truly amazing the extent some people will go to, to misinform the population.

And if you don't have time to be directly involved, please remember to set an example for our children - not to reward bullying over respect, hatred over love. Let's define ourselves by hope, not fear.

Those are just three of my ideas. You probably have better ones. Please share them. And remember: no matter how troubled you may have felt recently, you are neither helpless nor hopeless.

Stop and listen; We live in such a beautiful township.



"Say, Pooh, why aren't you busy?" I said.

"Because it's a nice day," said Pooh.

"Yes, but ---"

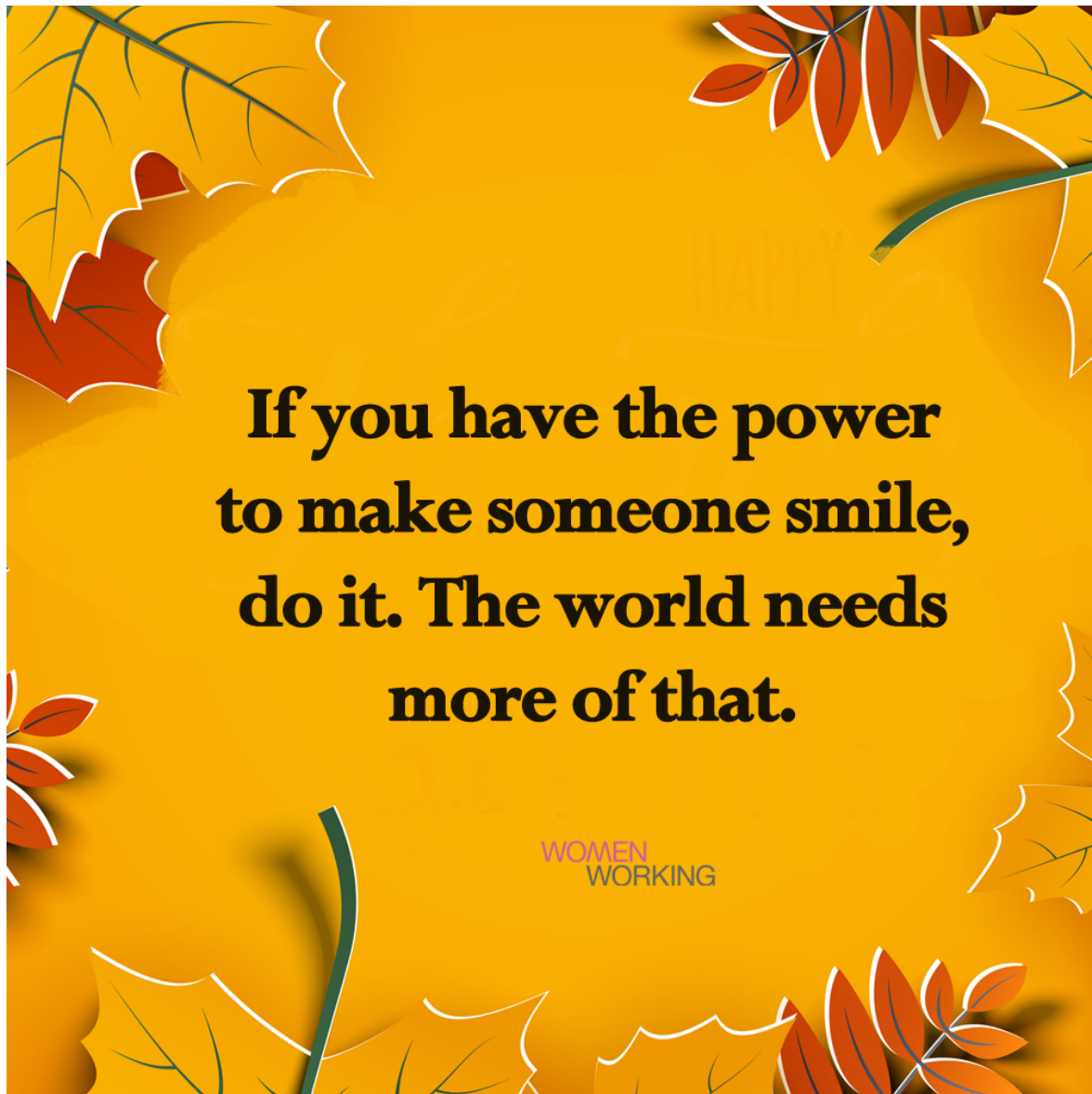
"Why ruin it?" he said.

"But you could be doing something Important," I said.

"I am," said Pooh.

"Oh? Doing what?"
"Listening," he said.
"Listening to what?"
"To the birds. And that squirrel over there."
"What are they saying?" I asked.
"That it's a nice day," said Pooh.
"But you know that already," I said.
"Yes, but it's always good to hear that somebody else thinks so, too," he replied.

- From the Tao of Pooh by Benjamin Hoff



Thank you. It has been an honour to share the last four years with you.

The formal part of this gathering is over. Safe home.