

# SHOPPING LOCAL MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER: FRAZER

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cil," he said, noting it will bring 169 units to the downtown core. "Once complete, it will add to the vibrancy of downtown Georgetown."

Continuing to support local businesses as they pivot yet again in the face of new pandemic restrictions remains a top priority for the municipality in 2022, he said — a sentiment that was echoed by Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce executive director Melanie Frazer.

"Businesses are still really uncertain about what the next six weeks will bring, let alone the next 52," she said, noting she hopes to see more financial supports delivered by the provincial and federal governments for businesses that are once again operating at reduced capacity.

With many businesses now also saddled with debt they've accumulated to stay afloat since March 2020, the message to shop local this year is more important than ever, noted Frazer.

And while some independent retailers or restaurateurs may choose to move onto ventures that are less risky in today's tough economy, she said there are still entrepreneurs choosing to open their doors locally for the first time during the pandemic — a trend she ex-

**"I do feel like there's this hope coming up over the horizon, we just need to get there."**

**— Melanie Frazer, Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce executive director**

pects to continue this year.

"I think it (the pandemic) has caused a lot of people to re-evaluate where they're working, where they are in life and what's important to them. So these new businesses that are popping up, you can really see that these are people's life passions," she said, pointing to 70 Below Treats, which was opened last year by chef Courtney Stanley in downtown Acton, as an example.

And with projects like the McGibbon moving ahead and bringing residents to downtown Georgetown, Frazer is optimistic that there are better times ahead for local businesses.

"I do feel like there's this hope coming up over the horizon, we just need to get there."

Similarly, Bonnette said the town has "a lot of irons in the fire" when it comes to



Town of Halton Hills photo

Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette

business growth, with 27 potential leads for companies that could come to Halton Hills.

The municipality is also continuing to focus on foreign direct investment opportunities, he said, such

as looking at companies in Europe that could invest in Halton Hills, with staff compiling a list of over 50 pre-qualified foreign leads.

"We're going to continue pressing to attract more industry, because the more industry we have here, the more sustainable we'll be in the future," said Bonnette, noting that commercial and industrial developments pay a high portion of the town's taxes.

On the political front, provincial and municipal elections set for this year are sure to deliver change locally, with residents having to choose a new mayor for the first time in almost two decades.

Bonnette said it's been "a privilege and an honour" to serve at the helm of council for the past 19 years.

As he prepares to leave office, he intends to keep the municipality on course with delivering services to residents, implementing diversity and equity initiatives, rolling out more measures to mitigate climate change, and ensuring projects approved in the 2022 town budget come to fruition.

"There's lots to look forward to in the new year, and it's hopefully going to be the end of the pandemic as we know it today," said Bonnette.

But with the coronavirus not disappearing any

time soon, he reminded residents to continue being cautious and practise due diligence.

"Everybody's got to pull together and listen to the science table and what the doctors are saying."

From a local youth perspective, Lee Day said he expects the pandemic restrictions and safety precautions like masking to continue for some, if not all, of 2022.

Certain measures that have been implemented throughout the pandemic, such as lockdowns, have been detrimental to some Halton Hills youth, said Day.

"I remember some people felt trapped, especially if they live in an unsupportive household," the 18-year-old said, noting it would be great if the town could create a virtual youth centre for support during any lockdowns in 2022. "That might really help some people."

*STORY BEHIND THE STORY: As 2022 kicks off and the pandemic continues into its third year, we wanted to examine what local residents and officials see coming for Halton Hills over the next 12 months.*



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