

# THRIVE Amherstburg has nine initiatives critiqued by Hamilton planner

By Ron Giofu

The town's new lobbying group launched with nine initiatives and the general manager of planning and economic development from Hamilton took a look at them.

Jason Thorne addressed THRIVE Amherstburg last week and provided input on the collective's nine initiatives. Thorne was in Amherstburg two years ago speaking at an Amherstburg Community Foundation event and returned, this time in a virtual sense, on the invitation of THRIVE co-founder and ACF past president Richard Peddie.

Regarding active transportation, Thorne indicated the COVID-19 pandemic has put a focus on outdoor recreational exercise and the need to get out and exercise.

"This is one of the central planks of any city building initiative," said Thorne.

Thorne said creating a network of cycling and walking routes was essential and not just a series of sidewalks or paved shoulders that don't connect.

"You really have to create a network before you start to see any economic benefit," he said.

Networks connect people to where they want to go, he added, adding planning for that includes thinking of the user experience.

"People have to have a perception that a facility is safe," he stated, and that while hardcore cyclists will still use the roadway, many casual riders will want to feel secure on a dedicated pathway.

Having protected bike lanes tend to attract more cyclists, stated Thorne.

In terms of reducing speeds, Thorne said a lot can depend on how a road is designed or engineered. He believed streetscaping and landscaping can have an impact to slow traffic.

It's an urban, suburban and rural issue," he stated.

The importance of parks was touched upon with Thorne emphasizing this also was highlighted through the COVID-19 pandemic. Neighbourhoods need places where people can go to have a healthy outing and that includes going to various types of parks.

Climate change goals can be achieved by doing what a municipality is doing, but only in a different way. Thorne said that could include changing over to fleets with electric vehicles, walking and cycling networks and using electric-powered equipment.

"You are already buying parks equipment," said Thorne. "Can this be shifted to electric?"

Public art, another of THRIVE Amherstburg's initiatives, is "about a sense of place, it is about civic pride," said Thorne.

"I think it is something that draws people to your community," he added.



Jason Thorne, Hamilton's general manager of planning and economic development, was the guest at a virtual presentation held by THRIVE Amherstburg last week. Thorne went over the nine initiatives the collective is championing. Screenshot

Hamilton used such initiatives as art on public utility boxes to large scale installations, but he said municipalities don't have to devote a lot of money to it. Styles of park benches and other amenities that towns usually buy anyway can be seen as public art.

"Public art does not have to be a mural on a wall or a statue in a plaza," he said.

Relating to heritage preservation, Thorne stated there is a role governments play but recognizing the work homeowners do to preserve their properties can be key as well.

Parking was another issue, with Thorne stating Hamilton is rethinking its parking policies. He indicated they are looking at businesses offering cash in lieu of parking with that funding going towards commercial parking structures. He believed providing parking can be a "barrier" for businesses.

Regarding open streets, Thorne didn't think times will fully return to the pre-COVID-19 era and that people are enjoying having a drink or a meal in what was a parking space. However, he acknowledged the debate around it including the benefit for restaurants versus professional services.

Affordable housing is a "generational challenge" for municipalities, Thorne added. That was the ninth and final initiative THRIVE presented.

The full presentation can be viewed by searching THRIVE Amherstburg on YouTube or by clicking the events tab at [www.thriveamherstburg.com](http://www.thriveamherstburg.com).

## Villanova student's writing skills land her award from OECTA

By Ron Giofu

The writing and storytelling skills of a St. Thomas of Villanova Secondary School student has allowed her to win an award from the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA).

Lauren Robinson, who just completed her Grade 9 year at Villanova, recently won a Young Authors Award from OECTA in the Grades 9-10 Short Story category. Her piece, entitled "Blood, Spoons, and Tears" is described as a coming-of-age story about a teenage girl coming to terms with her own mortality after being diagnosed with leukemia.

"It's definitely something I am very proud of myself for winning," said Robinson. "I worked really hard to accomplish it."

While the story is about a teen coming to terms with her leukemia diagnosis, Robinson indicated that's how the story begins but there is more to it than just that.

"There's more layers to it," she said, "but that's the call to action."

Robinson stated she initially began writing the story in December 2020 and submitted it in February 2021. She found out several months later that she actually won the writing competition.

"I've always enjoyed creative writing and I've been encouraged to do it by my teachers and peers," she said.

Noting she had a "great time" writing her 11-page short story, Robinson said she wanted to convey how



Lauren Robinson won a Young Authors Award from the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association for her short story "Blood, Spoons, and Tears." She just completed her Grade 9 year at St. Thomas of Villanova Secondary School. Submitted photo

a teenager would feel not only with the diagnosis but how they would overcome it. She pointed out it is not just about death and pending mortality, but "serves as a wake-up call" to people on being nicer to others, friendship and living life to its fullest.

"It's more of a celebration of life," she said. "It's very

human."

Doing research into the short story was also very enjoyable for Robinson, as she said she has an interest in medicine and she was able to find out more about it through writing what became her winning submission.

"I'd say this is the most intense project I've ever worked on," she added.

Robinson added she will likely pursue writing more as a hobby and not as a career.

Stating she was originally thinking she hadn't won because a few months went by without an e-mail from Villanova's English department head, she would eventually get the word and was quite pleased. Robinson said she won awards through Girl Guides, cooking and in softball, but this was her first award recognizing her writing abilities.

"I think this is the biggest feat I've accomplished," said Robinson.

The prize she earned from OECTA was a bursary towards her post-secondary education.

Robinson added she is not usually the type of person who typically shares her work with others, but believes winning the award from OECTA may allow her to step out of her comfort zone and enter more competitions. The LaSalle resident thanked her parents and teachers at Villanova for helping her along the way and allowing her to win the award.

"They helped me a lot," said Robinson. "They suggested edits here and there."