

# AYLMER EXPRESS

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WHERE THE COMMUNITY MEETS

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Walker Farms staff herded cows, evacuated from a burning barn, out of a fenced outdoor pasture where they were temporarily kept toward cattle trucks waiting to move them to other farms, while an aerial truck from Aylmer joined Malahide, Bayham and Central Elgin volunteer firefighters battling a huge blaze that engulfed the front section of the sprawling barn structure in Summers Corners Wednesday evening, Feb. 17. More pictures are inside on pages 6, 7 and 12. (AE/Rob Perry)

## Express-O-Gram

**A TOUGH ROAD AHEAD  
(BUT THEY'LL MANAGE IT)**

That was a devastating fire that attacked the Walker Farms' Summers Corners operation late last Wednesday afternoon. Thankfully no one was hurt.

However, they suffered the heartbreaking loss of almost 100 of their herd of dairy cattle and over \$3-million worth of milking parlour and barn.

Their recovery will take substantial time, money, mental and physical effort, not to mention the emotional stress of all those pressures plus regular family and business matters, all in the time of the frustrating COVID-19 restrictions. It's a daunting task, but one I think the Walker Family, their staff and community are especially equipped to handle. There are several generations involved on that fantastically successful agricultural enterprise which has risen from humble beginnings to one of the top operations in Canada.

That's a lot of growth in a bit over half a century and that entrepreneurialism was backed up with years of just plain hard work and some hard days, reversals, and pain, just because that's the way things go sometimes.

So on their record they are uniquely talented to handle and even flourish through the awkward and difficult days of this setback. Their stellar reputation, as farmers, business leaders and neighbours, extends not just through East Elgin County but provincially, nationally and internationally. They have earned our respect and confidence. We join the voices from all those communities wishing Walker Farms a speedy and thorough recovery and continued prosperity into the future.

### THIS IS US

There is an intricacy of abilities and talents that make a great community what it is and much of that precious infrastructure was on display in the hours and days following the outbreak of fire at Walker Farms' Summers Corners dairy operation last Wednesday at about 5 p.m.

Most important was the coordinated assault on the fire by Aylmer, Malahide, Central Elgin and Bayham volunteer fire departments who were able to bring the raging fire under control and have it extinguished by about 9:30 p.m. We have always extolled the virtues of volunteer fire departments whose members embody the caring, concern and

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## FIRE RAVAGES DAIRY BARN — Walkers "overwhelmed" with community support

**By Veronica Reiner,  
Local Journalism  
Initiative reporter**

The Walker family is grateful for the outpouring of community support after a fire ravaged one of their dairy barns last week.

"We're so overwhelmed by what everyone did for us," said John G. Walker. "It was really cool that everyone was able to pull together."

Firefighters, neighbours and local businesses rallied to help the family in their time of need.

"It's hard to name them all, because there were so many people that contributed, donated, and sent food," he said.

A fire destroyed a large portion of the main barn at Walker Farms in Summers Corners on Wednesday, Feb. 17, just before

5 p.m. Damages are estimated at \$3-million.

"The volunteer firefighters really stepped up," said Mr. Walker. "They did a phenomenal job."

He noted, "No one getting hurt was the number one thing."

Firefighters from Malahide, Bayham, Central Elgin and Aylmer managed to save the

back portion, which otherwise would have resulted in an additional \$2-million loss. The fire took about seven hours to bring under control.

While the family is thankful for what was saved, and that no people were injured, they were upset at the loss of livestock: an estimated 78 cows were lost as a result of the fire. "It's

obviously emotional a little bit. You never want to lose anything - the livestock are part of our lifestyle, our livelihood," said Mr. Walker. "You can always build new buildings, but losing livestock always sucks."

Another 875 cows were saved, quickly herded out of the barn and into a nearby penned

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## New Aylmer garbage contractor for \$508,869, a 56% increase

**By Veronica Reiner,  
Local Journalism  
Initiative reporter**

Aylmer council awarded the new curbside waste management collection service contract to Miller Waste Systems Inc., at a cost of \$508,869 annually (a 56% increase).

The seven-year contract with the Markham-based company is to begin on May 1, following the April 30 end of the current agreement with local provider Antonissen Trucking Inc.

The cost is \$182,569 more than the \$326,300 allocated for the curbside waste collection program in the 2021 budget, which was based on Antonissen's rate from a prior seven-year contract.

Aylmer began seeking a new contractor for garbage collection since September 2020, after the town's long-time provider, Antonissen requested a 25% increase for a two-year contract extension.

At that time, Operations Director Rob Johnson advised council that the contract could not be "renewed" at that rate, saying "something as substantial as that really is a whole new contract."

Deciding they couldn't accept such an increase for renewal, they issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) on Dec. 1, 2020.

During a virtual meeting on Monday, Feb. 22, Councillor Arthur Oslach asked Mr. Johnson how they would compensate

for the cost increase in the 2021 budget. "We'll have to make up that shortfall, and I don't want to see our taxes and levy go up."

Mr. Johnson responded that the budget is not yet complete. "We'll have to reevaluate where we are with a number of other items to see how we're going to fit this into the budget with the least impact onto the ratepayers."

The collection cost for the first quarter of 2021 will be at the existing rate, he added, as the current contract expires on Apr. 30.

Mr. Johnson said there would be a number of factors at play throughout the life of the new contract that may lessen the impact over time of the price increase. The Ontario Blue Box program is transitioning to individual producer responsibility, which will likely serve to reduce the town's curbside collection costs at some point during the contract term.

"I think everyone is facing the same problem we are this evening, that the costs have went up so significantly that it's impacting pretty well every municipality that's doing contracts right now," commented Aylmer Mayor Mary French. "We may have to re-analyze exactly what type of services we provide for residents and look at some alternatives if it gets too costly."

Mr. Johnson said staff and council can always re-examine the current system, and these

conditions are built into the contract. If there is a way for staff to switch to a more efficient system, he said, that option would be afforded in the contract.

Town staff did not look at any changes to the waste management system.

"Any changes to the waste management system, there needs to be some community involvement before we do it," said Mr. Johnson. So he didn't undertake that prior to going out for Request for Proposal (RFP). We just RFP'd for the service we had."

Cr. Pete Barbour asked if there may be an advantage to changing the collection service, and if so, how that would be rolled out.

Mr. Johnson said that part of the RFP process involved an Open Scope Proposal. This allowed contractors to submit proposals that offered changes to the existing program that would generate higher service levels, offer program savings, or both.

"None of the open scoped proposals fared very well," noted Mr. Johnson. "There were a few that gave us pause to consider, but the one that scored the top would be to keep the current system as it is."

Cr. Tom Charlton asked if there were many towns or municipalities that conduct their own garbage and recycling collection. Mr. Johnson said that

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## Car idling warning issued after Bayham woman, 20, found dead

**By Veronica Reiner,  
Local Journalism Initiative  
reporter**

Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) and Office of the Chief Coroner are issuing a warning about vehicle safety after a 20-year-old Bayham woman was found dead in Ingersoll.

Oxford OPP detachment responded to a report of a suspicious vehicle at a Charles Street West parking lot in Ingersoll on Monday, Feb. 15, at about 7 a.m.

The driver, an unresponsive woman, was pronounced dead at the scene by the attending coroner. Police say the death is not considered suspicious.

It is believed she left the vehicle on to stay warm, as "the temperature was extremely

cold that morning," noted OPP Acting Sergeant Ed Sanchuk.

"The family is devastated by this tragedy and really wanted everyone in our surrounding communities to be aware so that this does not happen to anyone else," said Sgt. Sanchuk.

Motor vehicle owners are reminded about the dangers of sitting in a running vehicle for extended periods of time.

In older vehicles, small leaks can develop in the exhaust system, leading to a potentially deadly build-up of carbon monoxide (CO) in the interior of the vehicle.

Carbon monoxide is an odourless, colourless and tasteless gas that can cause headaches, dizziness, drowsiness,

nausea and even death.

The OPP recommends the following tips to ensure safety:

- When a motor vehicle has gone off road in a winter storm, make periodic checks to ensure the tailpipe is free of snow while awaiting rescue.

- On vehicles more than 5-years-old, have a mechanic check the exhaust system of the car or truck annually. A small leak in the exhaust system can lead to a buildup of CO inside the car.

- Never run your car or truck inside a garage attached to a house even with the garage door open. Always open the door to a detached garage to let in fresh air when you run a car or truck inside.

## Temporary rezoning granted to allow for church meetings

**by Rob Perry  
of The Aylmer Express**

Malahide councillors, at a meeting on Thursday, Feb. 18, approved a temporary-use rezoning to allow a large workshop at 6242 Springfield Road to be used for the next year as a church.

Tony Wall, on behalf of a church in Norfolk, explained it didn't have enough room to

accommodate all its members given COVID-19 restrictions.

The church hadn't been able to meet during the recent provincial lockdown but was hopeful that services would resume.

However, even if they did churches were restricted in how much of the seating inside could actually be occupied.

He said the "brothers" had already been thinking about

building a new church in Bayham or Malahide, for the benefit of members who resided in this area.

At a previous meeting, councillors had challenged his request, noting he didn't have firm numbers on the cost of upgrading the workshop so it could be used as a place where the public assembled.

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