

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Title: *Direction to Staff Regarding Future Office Location, Use of Chantry Property, Design Options, and Public Engagement*

PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report seeks Council's and staff's direction to advance multiple municipal office options, including new construction, renovation of the Chantry office, and reuse of existing infrastructure, through the 90% design and costing stage, with a potential simultaneous tendering process if supported. This will provide the side-by-side, fully costed data Council needs to make an informed decision, particularly regarding the future of the Chantry office.

The Chantry building is falling into further disrepair and continues to weigh heavily on the Township's Asset Management Plan (AMP), requiring urgent capital investment. Without a clear decision, on the Chantry office both operational planning and long-term asset management remain stalled. Council and staff need real, costed options, not assumptions, to take to the public and guide responsible decision-making.

This decision is directly linked to the AMP, as it affects asset classification, future capital commitments, and current staff safety and working conditions. The outcome will shape the Township's financial sustainability and infrastructure planning for years to come.

Once costed options are complete, Council must proceed with public consultation. However, any Townhall must reflect broad, Township-wide input. The prior response, 75 residents, was not acted on by Council and cannot be considered representative. Doing nothing is no longer an option. Council must prioritize fairness, facts, and the needs of the entire community over the repeated opposition of a narrow interest group that has hindered progress in the past by spreading misinformation.

BACKGROUND

Over the past 25 years, councils have attempted to resolve the question of where and how to house the Township's administrative functions. Despite more than \$500,000 in cumulative spending, including \$138,000 in this term alone on design work for a proposed 21-office complex addition at the current Chantry site, no final decision has been reached, and each new term has revisited the issue without resolution.

Council is currently weighing its options, the financial implications of modifying existing designs and a design to return Chantry to a garage and a public archive, and the long-term role of the Chantry office. Members of Council hold differing views: some support retaining and upgrading Chantry, others favour building a new facility, while several have called for a fair, side-by-side cost comparison before any final decision is made.

In the meantime, the Chantry building continues to deteriorate, with increasingly frequent infrastructure failures impacting staff safety and operational effectiveness. With the 2026 lame duck period approaching, and the need to enter into binding construction contracts before then, resolving this matter within the current term is both urgent and essential.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS: Future Municipal Office Project – Side-by-Side Comparison Plan

1. Design Options, Chantry Reuse/Disposition, and 90% Costing

Provide council with a quote and timeline from IDEA Inc. (or another qualified firm) to:

- Develop a design for retrofitting the Chantry office into a three-bay garage and public archive.

All three core design concepts will be advanced to the 90% design and tender stage, including:

- A revised new-build office complex on a shortlisted site;
- The current 21-office addition design at the Chantry site (already paid for);
- The Chantry retrofit (if retained).

All estimates will include capital and implementation costs, operational impacts, lifecycle projections, and integration with AMP timelines. These efforts will be guided by the current working group to ensure continuity and Council oversight.

2. Land Option Shortlisting

Staff will identify and evaluate viable properties for a potential new municipal office. A report will be brought to Council including:

- If a site within a village is selected a townhall should be held immediately to gain support. Site readiness and development feasibility;
- Construction timeline (aligned with the pre-lame duck period);
- MTO access considerations (e.g., Elgin “free land” option).

3. Chantry Market Valuation and Long-Term Financial Assessment

To support a decision on whether to retain, retrofit, sunset, or declare Chantry surplus, staff will:

- Obtain two independent market valuations from licensed local realtors;
- Consult with Beckwith Township regarding their recent process for evaluating and selling a surplus municipal property;
- Provide a comprehensive report to Council outlining the financial, operational, and strategic implications of each scenario, selling, sunsetting, or repurposing Chantry, tied to long-term asset planning and capital forecasting.

This report will provide Council with the necessary long-term financial and asset management information to support a clear recommendation regarding the future of the Chantry site.

4. Simultaneous Tendering of Options

Staff will prepare a combined tender package including:

- Option 1: The current 21-office design for construction at the Chantry site;
- Option 2: A new office build on a shortlisted property, plus the Chantry retrofit (if retained).

This approach will allow Council to compare all options in real-time under identical market conditions and support a transparent decision-making process.

5. Working Group & Councillor Onboarding

The current office project working group will continue guiding the process. The newly elected councillor will join the group for onboarding and full representation in decision-making. An existing working group member of Council will be asked to volunteer to step down to keep the composition at four (4).

6. Project Priority & Reporting

This project will be designated a top priority by staff. Regular progress updates will be provided to Council. If delays arise, staff may recommend special Council meetings or hire outside help to maintain momentum. All deliverables must be completed by December 21st 2025, timed to allow a final decision before the 2026 lame duck period.

7. Public Engagement – After Tender

Tender Engagement:

After receiving verified tender results, Council will host a public Townhall at Portland Hall to present final designs, costs, and options. This will allow for informed public feedback prior to Council's final decision.

Council will require participation well beyond the 75 residents who previously submitted input, as that level of engagement was not acted on and cannot alone represent the community. The process must reflect Township-wide fairness, facts, and long-term needs.

RATIONALE

This plan provides a structured, evidence-based pathway forward amid diverse opinions on Council. It ensures that all major options—including building new, retaining or converting Chantry, or divesting surplus property—are explored to the same level of depth and rigour. By moving all viable options to the 90% design and costing stage and proceeding with simultaneous tendering, Council and the public will have the tools needed to make a decision grounded in facts, not assumptions.

With the condition of Chantry worsening and over \$500,000 spent to date without resolution, it is critical that Council prioritize this project, finalize its direction within this term, and act in accordance with the principles of transparency, fiscal responsibility, and long-term planning outlined in the Township's AMP.