

Clerk of the Township of Rideau Lakes,  
I am asking that the attached letter be entered into the next full meeting of the council as correspondence. Thank you.  
Date: 25 September 2023

To the Mayor and Councillors of Rideau Lakes,

RE: TOWNSHIP BUDGET 2024 SURVEY

I am a resident and taxpayer of Rideau Lakes. I recently completed the Rideau Lakes Township Budget 2024 Survey that was approved by all of Council.

A few days after completing the survey I was dismayed to find that Councillor Paula Banks had posted an ad hoc budget survey claiming to seek Facebook (FB) feedback in addition to the results of the Official Township Budget survey. Due to the many flaws and gaps in the personal Banks survey, I am seeking assurances from Council that the ad hoc survey will not be used by whole of Council for any weighting or decision-making regarding Township priorities. Areas of specific concern are described below.

The ad hoc survey is posted on two FB community pages as well as under Councillor Banks' FB pages. These FB pages have thousands of followers, many who are not residents of the Township. In the Banks survey there is no filter to confirm that survey participants are taxpayers. The ad hoc survey does not ask participants to which Ward they belong or their residency status, as is the case in the first 2 questions of the Official Township survey. So, whether intentional or not, should the ad hoc survey be used in any way to determine or influence Township priorities, Councillor Banks has offered non-residents/non-taxpayers/non-voters a say in Official Township budget planning and priorities.

Just as there are many non-residents/non-taxpayers/non-voters who are members of the FB community pages, there are also many taxpayers who are not members of these FB pages. In contrast, all residents have access to the Township website and therefore the Official Township survey. Should this ad hoc survey be used to influence Township priorities, intentional or not, many of the voting public will have been excluded.

This ad hoc survey has a high potential for current residents to double their input by identifying their priorities both through the Official Township survey and the ad hoc survey. The personal Banks survey does not ask respondents if they have already completed the Official Township survey, and since the Official Township survey is anonymous, there is no way to cross reference and rule out duplicate submissions. This compromises any attempt to do a comparative analysis or weighting of the ad hoc survey to the Official Township survey.

Further to this point, FB comments have observed that people can get into the Township survey to complete it more than once. Certainly, the safeguards of the survey can be circumvented if one has the technical knowledge and purposely wishes to do so. This is also true for the FB survey. I suggest this is a red herring which distracts from the real issue, which is the duplicate input presented by a purported, duplicate survey.

The stated intent of the ad hoc survey is to seek additional input above and beyond the Official Township survey. There is actually only one question in the personal Banks survey: voting on the priorities of the Township.

The Official Township survey question related to priorities is designed to rank those priorities which have already been identified for planning and budgeting purposes. There is no ranking in the personal Banks survey. While participants can select one or more priority on the list, there is no way to determine how that participant actually ranked each priority they selected. For example, if a participant selected both the fire hall and the Portland Hall Library, there is no way of knowing which project is considered number 1 and number 2. So, there is no relativity with the Official Township question.

In addition to the lack of ranking, there is no explanation of this when completing the survey. Was the intent to have participants select only their top priority? It has created confusion. It appears that many participants selected a single priority while others selected more than one project. Therefore, there is no way of ranking priorities within the ad hoc survey itself, let alone in any attempt to do a comparative with the Official Township survey.

In the ad hoc survey, participants may contribute additional items to the list of priorities which are not identified in Township plans or budget. Not only have these items not had any analysis nor the consideration of CECs, other committees or full Council, there is no relativity to the Official Township list of priorities. They cannot be weighted against the planned and budgeted priorities.

While the stated intent of the personal Banks survey is to seek additional input beyond the Official Township survey, aside from the option to add new items to the priority list, the posted question duplicates the Official survey question, without any opportunity to rank items. Since additional items have no relativity, as discussed above, there is in fact, less insight from the ad hoc survey than in the Official Township survey. And because the ad hoc survey has only one question, there is no additional insight to any of the other important budget issues included in the Official Township survey.

Finally, it is highly likely that there are many residents who believe because they have completed the ad hoc survey, that they have provided their input to Budget 2024, not realizing that there are many more issues and questions in the Official Township survey. This serves to undermine responses to the Official Township survey, as well as undermine the input of taxpayers.

Given all of Council approved the Official Township budget 2024 survey prior to launch; given the only survey accessible to all of Township taxpayers is the Official Township survey; given all the gaps and flaws in the personal Banks survey as discussed above, I respectfully request that Council provide assurance to the voting public, that the only survey results to be used as the basis for the analysis, report and recommendations on the Rideau Lakes Township 2024 budget, be that of the Official Rideau Lakes Township Budget 2024 survey.

Furthermore, I request that no Township staff resources be dedicated to the analysis and interpretation of a personal survey.

Sincerely,  
Lesley Ulliyett