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The Council Township of Rideau Lakes

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The Purpose of this Letter to Council

As many of you know, I was involved for 12 years on local council, proud to represent the Township of Rideau Lakes as Mayor. Although I left politics in 2000, I have continued to follow all Rideau Lakes councils since my departure. For some time, I have been concerned about the performance of this most recent council particularly regarding the financial plan and services offered by the Township of Rideau Lakes.

Leadership and the Role of Council

As councillors you were elected to provide your leadership skills, knowledge and ideas to lead the municipality into the future. Leadership is looking at tomorrow. Leadership is looking to the future. Leadership is having a vision. One cannot lead yesterday, last week or last month. **Your role is not to bemoan decisions of the past, but to manage and look after the outcomes of yesterday's decisions.**

Councils' role is to create policy. Policy should be created so as to mitigate any public liabilities. One must understand that a public place is where people have been invited expressly or implied. **You were not elected to tinker in the day-to-day operations interfering with the role of the paid staff. It is the role of the CAO and staff to implement that policy.**

Council's role is also to represent the interests of the community. That means speaking with and responding to constituents. Some councillors are not living up to this responsibility, which I have personally experienced. **I placed a call to a Rideau Lakes councillor in mid-February 2023 and did not get a response. I sent a follow-up email to the same councillor, and to date still no response. Obviously, this councillor has no interest in doing the job he was elected to do.**

Budgets, Taxes and Reserves

Managing the multi-million-dollar budget of Rideau Lakes township is one of, if not THE most important functions of Council. **When I listen to council meetings, I question how familiar some members are with the math requirements to calculate taxes.** It is important to know how these numbers change in different scenarios. Councillors need to familiarize themselves with how assessments and taxes affect plans, and the impacts if any of these numbers change. This is how you develop the future strategy for the Township of Rideau Lakes.

More than once I have heard Councillor Dunfield, for example at a coffee chat and at the Sept. 24th meeting on the Treasurers financial reports, say "I don't know anything about budgets, or banking or finances." That is a profoundly disappointing statement from someone involved as a decision maker in a \$22.4-million-dollar budget.

According to the Municipal Finance Officers' Association reserves are one of the most important tools available to municipalities for achieving financial sustainability and flexibility. Reserves not only assist municipalities in managing risks, but they also play a key role in the financing of capital costs and the provision of affordable and stable services to constituents.

Too many times I have listened to councillors withdraw support for the importance of reserves in the municipality's long term financial plan. Councillor J. Banks and Councillor Dunfield in particular; all one has to do is review the video of the March 6, 2023 council meeting.

On Sept. 24th at the MSC meeting the Township treasurer presented a Long-Term Financial Sustainability Plan to the entire Council. Many councillors, if not all, complimented the Treasurer on the projections, the assumptions and the tracking of capital expense requirements over the next ten-year period. The majority of Council then ignored the cautions and advice in that plan.

You are here to focus on making the larger community of Rideau Lakes a progressive community providing public services in a cost-efficient manner while maintaining a strong financial base.

Learn your math. Learn financial management. It's your job.

Polls

Intuition and common sense suggest to me that one should not rely heavily on Facebook polls. First, as an elected decision maker one should always keep an open mind and listen to everyone. Second, are all participants in a conversation at the same level of knowledge? As an elected person doing research for a subject or issue you should see things from many perspectives and sources, not just a single poll or the loudest voice. Then determine which perspective meets the desired collective good of the community. After all, that is the oath of office you took to uphold for the benefit of the community.

Buildings

More and more I have heard some councillors advocating for the quickest and cheapest options for our Township infrastructure without regard for the potential consequences. In micro-economics at the university level one is taught about the life span of buildings and how to calculate the factors associated with cost to build, maintain and salvage. Many commercial buildings are determined to have an effective life span of 30 years, one generation. Flat roof buildings with tar and stone chip cover have proven problematic over the years. Asphalt shingle roof materials very seldom last the stated warranty period. So, the cheaper to build will likely mean higher costs to maintain. There is some wisdom in constructing a building right the first time.

In Summary

My purpose in writing this letter is to encourage Councillors to do better. Community expectations are higher today than at anytime previously. Not meeting these expectations is disappointing when ignoring professional advice; following ill-conceived processes; and listening to the noisy few. The quiet, deep thinking, knowledgeable, experienced individuals do exist and they have a vote as well.

Does this Council have the pertinacity to prove to the community that this ship, lost at sea, can safely return to dock. I look forward to a response from Council.

Yours truly,

