

December 15, 2025

Mr. Rob Flack, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Dear Minister Flack:

Setting the Record Straight in Rideau Lakes Township

My name is Wendy Alford, and I am a spokesperson for the Rideau Lakes Grassroots Group (RLGG). I am writing to address a letter sent to you after the October 6th meeting by Councillor Paula Banks and which she published on social media. This letter contains exaggerated and false claims about RLGG, the Mayor of Rideau Lakes and other members of Council. Such misleading and inflammatory statements negatively impact the reputation of our community, its leaders and its citizens. It is essential to challenge these distortions and provide an accurate account of our group and the leadership in Rideau Lakes Township.

RLGG is a respected local advocacy group that is supported by a broad base of residents who are deeply committed to the future of our township. The group was formed organically in August 2023 by individuals concerned about the direction of Council. Our primary objectives are to raise awareness within the community about important issues, advocate for matters of public interest and hold Council accountable for their decisions and conduct.

Unfortunately, five members of Council have consistently exhibited unacceptable behaviour and have refused to listen to, or even acknowledge, public sentiment that contradicts their agenda. As a result, RLGG remains vocal in its efforts, which has led to friction with these councillors. Rather than addressing concerns raised, these five members have chosen to react by lashing out.

Councillor Paula Banks and her supporters on Council regularly attempt to vilify and discredit RLGG through exaggerations and false claims. For example, Paula Banks' letter references supposed incidents of RLGG members "screaming and spitting." To clarify, during the October 6th council meeting, which prompted your office to monitor meetings until the end of this term, as Councillor Banks and four others were lambasting the Mayor regarding Integrity Commissioner penalties, a gallery member expressed outrage at their behaviour and rose to depart. As he was leaving, he was pursued and yelled at by Deputy Mayor Hutchings, one of the five. Later, I personally stood, expressing my disgust at the treatment of Councillor Pollard, and left the meeting. I can assure you there was no screaming during these incidents, as the video evidence confirms.

The reference to spitting is a patently false claim going back to 2023 that Councillors Paula and Jeff Banks continue spin. This incident was investigated in September 2024 and determined to be unfounded. The Integrity Commissioner's report (September 19, 2024-006) confirmed that the individual involved was not a member of RLGG and that there was no evidence of spitting or threats against Councillor Jeff Banks, as confirmed by video footage (November 6, 2023). RLGG does not condone hate or threatening behaviour and has made this clear publicly.

Yet efforts continue to be made to label RLGG as a hate group, special interest group or political group, and to silence or ban us from public meetings. Unfortunately, this has also resulted in anyone expressing a contrary opinion to the group of five being labelled as RLGG, regardless of their affiliation. While many residents seek information from us or follow us on social media, a significant number simply disagree with the direction of the five councillors and voice their opinions independently.

Speculation about RLGG's supposed political interference is unfounded. Neither the Mayor nor any Councillor is part of RLGG. Our group is vocal about issues that matter to the community, and our views often align with those of the Mayor and the three councillors not associated with the group of five. We communicate with Council members to voice opinions or discuss community concerns, as any citizen might. The suggestion that RLGG was involved in the Integrity Commissioner case against Councillor Carr is ridiculous. We were unaware of the complaint until Council attempted to avoid publication, at which point RLGG lobbied for the report to be made public.

Councillor Banks' letter contains historical grievances and baseless accusations against the Mayor, intended to undermine trust rather than promote constructive dialogue. The five councillors have sought legal opinions on every mayoral decision, resulting in taxpayer funds being used for legal fees to challenge both the Mayor and the Province on Strong Mayor Powers. Claims regarding the Mayor and Integrity Commissioner complaints are at the least, misleading. Every Council member has been found in violation of the code of conduct during this term, including Councillor Paula Banks on at least five occasions.

The persistent behaviour of the five has created an environment where the Mayor is unable to maintain the decorum expected in Council chambers, with hostility obvious toward everyone that opposes them. This behaviour is reportedly worse in closed meetings where they cannot be observed. This is what eventually led to a public outcry and the Mayor's direct request to you to dissolve Council. This step was supported by RLGG and a request by MPP Steve Clark for MMAH support, ultimately resulting in provincial monitoring of council. So, it is incredulous how Ms. Banks has twisted MMAH monitoring to being a result of provincial concerns about the Mayor!

Contrary to Ms. Banks claims of ethical and procedural concerns regarding the land in Elgin, the mayor's veto to retrofit current offices was based primarily on provincial priorities and community feedback. The present offices are in an isolated area surrounded by farmland with limited infrastructure and zero growth potential. Relocating to a more central, accessible location with development potential supports the economic needs of our village businesses and as mentioned, supports provincial priorities. While the Elgin site may be suitable, other potential locations will also need to be considered. Unfortunately, the group of five continues to push motions attempting to force a retrofit, requiring the mayor to re-veto the same matter repeatedly. Further, RLGG believes these attempts may contravene provincial legislation on Strong Mayor Powers. A final observation on this matter, recent by-election results, where the candidate supporting a new build won decisively, was a litmus test as to where community sentiment is on this issue.

Concerning the new procedural bylaw to which the letter refers, it is blatantly designed to usurp the duties of the Mayor. It has also had a chilling effect on public discourse by censoring correspondence and delegations opposed to the agenda of the five, stifling the voices of the very residents they are elected to serve. RLGG has documented numerous instances of the five councillors showing disdain for both our group and the public.

In summary, Councillor Banks' litany of grievances represents a continued vendetta against RLGG, Mayor Hoogenboom, and other members of Council. Her letter to you is divisive, based on falsehoods and personal gripes intended to mislead and silence constructive opposition. I urge you to consider additional measures to intervene in Rideau Lakes Township. One immediate step would be to expand monitoring to closed meetings. However, in reality, the best action you could take for our community would be to dissolve council and either call an immediate election in Rideau Lakes or install an interim manager until the next election in 10 months.

Sincerely,

Wendy Alford, Spokesperson
Rideau Lakes Grassroots Group