

2015

The Township of Rideau Lakes ***Strategic Plan – 2015 and Forward*** identifies the municipality’s vision and priorities for the next 10 years. Vision 2025 includes well-developed infrastructure, viable villages and hamlets, an expanded business base, a thriving retirement community with services closer to home, financial sustainability, **the development of a municipal hub** and environmentally sustainable waterfront development.

2016 – 2019

The future of the Portland Community Hall is assessed by Eastern Engineering Group Inc. and report highlights structural integrity issues with the building, deterioration of user facilities and poor accessibility. Staff report also details deficiencies present and states that **“it is at the end of its useful life in the absence of a major restoration.”** In 2018 the Gallagher property is purchased for \$365K potentially to become part of a new build project. Cost estimates on major Chantry office renovation are \$800K. Estimates to build a new, modern facility with the same square footage as the existing hall range from \$1.0 – \$1.4 million. A 2019 community visioning exercise identifies an improved or new hall and community hub as a priority.

2020

A township survey of Portland area residents on the future of the Portland Community Hall receives 277 responses. 76% of respondents chose building a new hall over renovating the existing structure. The Municipal Services Committee considers a staff report regarding the renewal of the Portland Hall **and this report recommends a variety of co-located uses to better serve the whole municipality.**

2021

The Portland Hall property is chosen for the new HUB development. +VG Architects is selected through a competitive process to prepare designs. **Two consultation sessions are held to gather public input.** Three options are presented at the second session; two include municipal offices and one excludes offices. **Option two, which includes one building containing a new hall, library and municipal offices is chosen by the majority of respondents.** The Municipal Services Committee approves moving forward with option two by a vote of 7-2. This decision is confirmed at the January 2022 Regular Council Meeting. Also in July 2021 +VG Architects reported on the Functional & Code Assessment on Chantry’s office building. **In the Summary and Conclusion that report states “Given the age and location we do not perceive any economic benefits to the ratepayers of the municipality in undertaking a renovation of the existing administration offices”.**

2022

In May, +VG Architects provides a Class D estimate of \$3.9 million to Council; Council approves the creation of 33% drawings. The 33% drawings and Class B estimate of \$5.8 million is presented to Council in August. Council directs staff to begin seeking grant funding using the 33% drawings, authorizes +VG to create 66% drawings and updated estimate. In October the 66% drawings are received by the Township with a Class B Estimate of \$6.5 million. The old Portland Hall is demolished and site preparation begins for the new build. The 2022 Municipal Election is held; three new members

are elected to Council. **In December the 90% drawings and Class A estimate of \$7.5 million is received by the Township.** Councillor Cathy Livingston, a vocal supporter of the Portland HUB project, passes away leaving a vacancy on Council.

2023

In January, the new Council is presented with the 90% drawings and can proceed with a tender. On January 16/23 the Treasurer presents the Preliminary Financing Plan for the Hub and other Financial Considerations including that Development Charges could be utilized over the course of the project, how to manage debt repayment, estimate of borrowing capacity, costs associated with Fire Station replacement, purchase of the old Portland dump property and the ramifications of not keeping pace with needed tax increases and not contributing to reserves for infrastructure, etc.

A by-election is scheduled for May to fill the vacancy in Bastard-South Burgess Ward. A new councillor is elected who opposes the planned Portland HUB, and the project is considered dead after 6 years of planning and public consultations which had led to a shovel-ready, architect-designed multi-use facility at a cost of \$330K and instead there is a motion to start a new RFP process which gives priority to the design of a hall/library for Portland which is passed with a slim majority of the Municipal Services Committee in May. **Rideau Lakes Grassroots (RLGG) as an advocacy group had its beginning at this point and debuted with a communication piece (or “blue” flyer) distributed throughout the Township in August 2023.** Council, again with a slim majority, awards the Portland Hall/Library RFP in July 2023 to Altered Roots Architects Inc. at a cost of \$106K. In September 2023 the Treasurer presents the Long Term Financial Stability (2024-2032) report which outlines that **the Township has not been generating enough revenue through property taxes to pay the bills and we have not contributed recommended amounts to Infrastructure Reserves for multiple years that would lessen the need to borrow for capital projects such as Portland Hall/Library, enhanced Fire Station and earlier than expected purchase of the old Portland landfill all the while maintaining regular annual capital projects (i.e. roads, etc.)**

2024

The cautions from Treasurer Laprade were repeated in January 30/24 in the Capital Budget and 4 Year Forecast Report and on Feb 2024 in the Long Term Financial Sustainability Report. **It was at that point that RLGG ceased talking about the HUB project as it was apparent that before any large new capital project for the Township’s offices should be delayed for a couple of years until the Township’s financial position could be improved in light of the planned expenditures of \$3 mil for Portland Hall/Library, \$1 mil addition to new Fire Station not covered by insurance and the \$1 mil purchase of Portland landfill property 2 years ahead of schedule as well as the lack of reserves. All of these would be financed in 2024 and 2025.**

Council discussed in multiple meetings and insisted that the only way to compare “apples to apples” was to get an actual costing on the retrofit/addition of Chantry and initially accepts that for a comparison we would also need an actual cost on a new build option. The majority of Council insisted that a tender and costing for a new build in a new location could only be considered **after** a price had been received on the retrofit/addition and that argument evolved into only new build being considered if the retrofit/addition was markedly out of line. **Note that the estimates coming from IDEA for each of the 4 options presented were quite close with the estimate for a Chantry**

retrofit/addition at \$3.102 to \$3.412 mil (depending on keeping garage) and a new build (depending on existing location or greenfield build) was estimated at \$3.369 to \$3.344 mil.

On Sept 15/24 IDEA presented the designs and initial estimates for each to Council and was berated for providing their best advice on providing 4 potential options when all that was wanted was 1 option. There was also a call to cancel the already advertised meeting on Sept 18/24 to get public feedback on the project but the meeting went ahead. IDEA returned Oct 15/24 to present **their report and recommendation for a greenfield new build** and was again berated for presenting all potential options. Also ignored was the staff's recommendation for a staged approach to a retrofit option as it was clear that was the only option that would be considered. In that meeting the results of the public meeting and the staff survey were also dismissed. Discussion ended with a motion being passed for IDEA to proceed through to construction phase at cost of \$137K. At the Oct 28/24 meeting Council reversed their decision and opted not award the construction stage to IDEA which had been staff's recommendation in the previous meeting. Also at the Oct 28/24 meeting the Treasurer laid out the Township's financial state again. Council was alarmed by the Treasurer's report and Councillor P. Banks remarks that "I do think we need to take a serious look at our asset management plan. If I had seen that and our financial situation in reality, and understood it as much as I do now, I probably would not have voted to build the hall in Portland to be honest but we now have that hall." Treasurer Laprade resigned the next morning.

2025

The Acting Treasurer speaks to the same financial concerns as the previous Treasurer on January 13/25 in the Operating and Capital Budget Report. Finally in early May 2025 Council passed a more realistic tax increase and commits to contributing the necessary funds into Reserves to begin addressing the long identified infrastructure funding gap. The Province broadens Strong Mayor Powers to 169 more municipalities effective May 1/25. On May 5/25 the 99% drawings for the Chantry retrofit/addition are presented to Council and staff is directed to move as quickly as possible to prepare the tender documents. The Mayor notifies Council of his intention to use his veto power and on May 26/25 the Mayor exercises that Strong Mayor veto power. Council has 21 days to reply but calls a Special Meeting to take place 48 hours later on May 28/25 but the vote to overturn the Mayor's veto fails as a 2/3's vote is required to overturn the Mayor's veto. The majority of council now continues to seek avenues to subvert the veto, attempting to discredit the Mayor's rationale, discredit the financial expertise of the previous Treasurer and attempting to launch a legal challenge of the Provincial legislation, despite a Supreme Court decision in favour of the province. And voting to use our taxpayer dollars to support these efforts!