

October 2026

Dear Minister Flack,

As your office is aware and as previously suggested, prior to the August hearings on Bill 9 and the Integrity Commissioner system, our council submitted a confidential report to the Ontario Ombudsman outlining serious governance concerns in Rideau Lakes. That report detailed evidence that Mayor Arie Hoogenboom and several of his supporters on council have worked directly with, and or publicly supported the Rideau Lakes Grassroots Group (RLGG). A group that has, in our view, acted as their political arm by promoting false or misleading information and have with their supporters repeatedly disrupted council meetings, interfering in municipal decision-making. Like as seen on Oct 6<sup>th</sup> when councillor Maxwell's husband and Wendy Alford, spokesman for the RLGG started screaming at us or when their supporter and choice for Pro-new Office candidate in the by-election I won, in 2023, on Nov 6<sup>th</sup> of that year, spat on councillor Jeff Banks, during the meeting.

We are still awaiting a response to that submission and our request for assistance. Since then, Mayor Hoogenboom has continued to mislead council and the public through inconsistent and false statements. He was recently found in breach of the Municipal Act, after your office stepped in and recommended staff get a legal opinion. This time for applying unlawful penalties that, in my view, were retribution for eleven Integrity Commissioner (IC) complaints, all related to our unwillingness to support his proposed new office project. The mayor was also part of council in 2016, when a \$1.2 million deficit was concealed from taxpayers, which also leads to concern for me about his transparency and the Strong Mayor Powers budget, in 2026.

Our council has acted in accordance with the recommendations in your earlier correspondence and currently has an active request before the Ombudsman to investigate the relationship between certain council members and the RLGG, as well as possible political interference in the Councillor Carr harassment case.

We have also sought professional outside advice on the issue that has most divided council, the Mayor's Strong Mayor Power (SMP) veto blocking the 99% drawings of the Chantry office from proceeding to tender or RFP. The mayor has stated he will veto all motions about enlarging the current office in Chantry, as he does not care about the costs, he will only support a new office. That matter will be coming back before council shortly. In addition, much of the current tension stems from the mayor's conduct during meetings, where his attempts to dominate debate have become our most disruptive governance issue. To address this, council, after receiving some advice from professionals is

considering amendments to the Procedural By-Law that would require the chair to relinquish their seat when participating in debate.

A motion on October 14<sup>th</sup>, will also propose engaging governance expert Rick O'Connor to help restore decorum, impartiality, and effective meeting management.

Recently, the Mayor has escalated matters by publicly calling for a new election at an estimated cost of approximately \$60,000 to Rideau Lakes taxpayers, in my view simply because a majority of council will not support his push to build a new municipal office on what he calls the **“free land”** in Elgin. Not mentioned originally, but council has since learned the land was not free; the owner was seeking Township assistance to obtain an MTO permit he had been unable to secure independently. For me this raises ethical and procedural concerns about bonusing and underscores the need for continued provincial oversight.

The mayor also forgets that the **“Gang of Five”** as he calls us in the media , were never found guilty of any harassment or procedural breaches against him and his supporters on council as claimed, but he was several times and against several council members. The Province and the Integrity Commissioner intervened because the penalties he imposed, were seventy-five days greater than the recommended sanction of a simple apology, or that there was no wrong doing, which placed Rideau Lakes in legal jeopardy, for the illegal removal of our pay.

On March 3<sup>rd</sup> video when council was imposes 75 days penalty, Jeff Banks says **“I was not found guilty of that”**.

The mayor says **“It does not matter; you did it and from my perspective you did it and you should have been found guilty of that”**. The mayor continues to publicly claiming that we **“got off on a technicality”** and **“benefited,”** statements which are completely false.

Although he has always said he would follow IC recommendations, he ignored them when the eleven complaints, each tied to his office project initiative , came forward. It was the mayor and his supporters who breached the Municipal Act and then shared confidential information, placing the Township in jeopardy, because they did not agree with the IC that our behaviour at meetings was not harassing or bullying.

It was also the mayor's allies, including members of the Grassroots group and Councillor Maxwell's husband Ken Maxwell, who contributed to the disorder at the October 6 meeting. The CAO asked the mayor to act to restore order, a lack of leadership clearly visible in the meeting recording.

Despite repeated claims, the mayor has never apologized or corrected his false statements. It is therefore no surprise that he has now faced three votes of non-confidence. I recommend that your staff review the redacted version of the report submitted to the Ombudsman, attached as an Open Letter to Mayor Hoogenboom.

Council has sought assistance from every appropriate avenue, the Integrity Commissioner, the Ombudsman, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, AMO, and MPP Steve Clark, since the fall of 2023 when the Carr case was ongoing.

MPP Clark has now encouraged us to rebuild public trust and resolve matters locally, and we are doing so. However, the RLGG's interference and the mayor's inability to chair meetings impartially remain major obstacles. We hope to address both through the Procedural By-Law amendments on October 14.

Minister, I respectfully ask for your continued attention and support to ensure that Rideau Lakes returns to a standard of governance that upholds the Municipal Act and is not distorted for political advantage by a Mayor with Strong Mayor Powers, who repeatedly makes false claims and lost the confidence of his Council due to his own poor behaviour. A mayor in that position cannot justify spending \$60,000 on an election or punishing councillors for refusing to support his office project.

The division created by Mayor Hoogenboom and councillors Maxwell, Pollard, and Delaney and fueled by RLGG's constant attacks on five members (**the majority**) of council that their RLGG blue flyer made the **FIVE**, is the source of this dysfunction all over the mayor's wish to build a legacy office project. Restoring trust and public confidence will require accountability, transparency, and adherence to fair governance practices and most importantly mayor Hoogenboom's willingness to follow the new procedural bylaws.

Sincerely,

**Councillor Paula Banks**

Bastard and South Burgess Ward (Ward 1)

Township of Rideau Lakes