

March 15, 2026 – COUNCILLOR BULLOCH’S UPDATE FROM COUNCIL

From: Dustin Bulloch
Sent: March 15, 2026 6:45 PM
Subject: Update from Council - March 2026

Hello Everyone,

I hope you are doing well and looking forward to the spring season!

Over the past month Council has continued working with and advocating for residents regarding our concerns with the proposed ALTO High Speed Rail project as well as finalised the 2026 Budget; details are outlined below.

1. Budget 2026

- a. The 2026 Budget was deemed passed on March 4th, 2026, with a **4.84%** Township tax rate increase. When combined with the County rate increase of **2.46%** and a School Board rate increase of **0%** the overall tax rate increase for 2026 will be **3.28%**. This budget maintains operating service levels, invests in numerous capital projects for our roads and facilities, increases funding to our reserves, and absorbs significant cost increases such as 11% for OPP coverage. This tax rate increase is also nearly 1% less (0.94%) than the 5.78% increase included in the 2025 Budget.

News Release regarding the 2026 Budget: [Rideau Lakes Township 2026 Budget Deemed Passed](#)

- b. The 2026 Township tax rate increase is in the middle of the pack when compared to our neighbouring municipalities in Leeds-Grenville, Lanark and the Cities of Ottawa and Kingston. The chart below includes both draft and confirmed tax rate information available at the time of writing.

2026 Tax Rate Increases - Comparison with Neighbouring Municipalities	
PASSED DRAFT	
Municipality	% Increase
Gananoque	8.94%
Perth	8.13%
Elizabethtown-Kitley	7.58%
Drummond-North Elmsley	6.98%
Mississippi Mills	6.41%
Brockville	5.67%
Tay Valley	5.29%
Leeds and the Thousand Islands	4.90%
Rideau Lakes	4.84%
Augusta	4.59%
Montague	4.43%
Smiths Falls	4.00%
Prescott	3.94%
Merrickville-Wolford	3.81%
Ottawa	3.75%
Kingston	3.75%
Lanark Highlands	3.59%
Front of Yonge	3.50%
Edwardsburg-Cardinal	3.00%
North Grenville	2.61%
Carleton Place	1.95%

c. Capital Projects for South Crosby Ward included in the 2026 Budget:

Capital Projects for South Crosby Ward Budget 2026	
Project	Cost \$
Crosby Road - Base Reconstruction	\$ 264,000.00
Smiths Road - Base Reconstruction	\$ 100,000.00
Garrett Road - Double Surface Treatment (Tar and Chip)	\$ 73,700.00
Isthmus Road - Single Surface Treatment (Tar and Chip)	\$ 63,500.00
Ritz Road - Single Surface Treatment (Tar and Chip)	\$ 104,200.00
Elgin Municipal Complex - Cistern Inspection	\$ 1,500.00
Elgin Municipal Complex - Replacement of Exterior Columns	\$ 16,000.00
Elgin Municipal Complex - Roof Repairs	\$ 4,000.00
Elgin Municipal Complex - Add Roof Insulation	\$ 8,000.00
Morton Hall - New Water Softener	\$ 2,500.00
Elgin Firehall - New Water Softener	\$ 3,400.00
Chaffeys - Build trail from new parking lot to Cataraqui Trail	\$ 10,000.00
Total	\$ 650,800.00

d. Mayor's Veto

- i. 2026 is the first Rideau Lakes budget subject to the strong mayor powers imposed on our municipality by the Province of Ontario. Council considered these vetoed items at our Regular Council Meeting on March 2nd. The agenda, attachments and video recording for the meeting can be found here: [Regular Council Meeting - March 02, 2026](#)
- ii. Below is a list of the items vetoed by the Mayor along with my comments on each item:

Mayors Vetoes Budget 2026			
Line Item	Cost \$	Added/Removed	My Comments
South Elmsley - Pickleball Court	\$75,000.00	Added	This project was designed in 2021 with initial phases completed in 2022/2023 including the installation of the pumptrack and general site preparation for other elements including a play area and the pickleball court. These further phases have not progressed since 2023 leaving the site unfinished. Moving forward with the pickleball court, along with the playground and shade structure also included in the 2026 Budget, will see substantial completion of the recreational elements at this site. Since this project is shovel ready, partially finished, and invests in an underserved area of our municipality I supported moving this project forward.
Gallagher Property - Coach House Roof Replacement	-\$36,200.00	Removed	This project would see the repair of the coach house building roof on the Gallagher property in Portland. Future use of this site, including the coach house, remains under discussion with the Portland community, however maintaining and utilizing the existing structure has been identified as a priority for many. At our January 16th budget meeting I supported adding this item to the budget, however following that meeting, on February 17th, Council approved direction to staff to apply for a Trillium Grant specifically to cover these roof repair costs along with other site rehabilitation work. With this project specifically identified in the grant application I felt it was appropriate to remove this item from the 2026 Capital Budget.
Chantry Office - Stone Façade Repair	-\$7,000.00	Removed	The identified stone façade issue is minor in nature and does not threaten the structural integrity of the building. This facility will require a full recapitalization in the near future; therefore, I feel it is appropriate to hold off on spending money on repairs that are not structurally or operationally imperative.

Elgin Municipal Complex - Walkway Repairs	-\$29,500.00	Removed	This issue has been identified by the Elgin CEC as a priority due to safety and accessibility concerns. I supported adding this item to the budget on January 16th and advocated to have it kept in the budget during the Mayors veto stage. During the Council vote on the Mayors vetoes it was my expectation that each line item would be voted on individually as had been the case through the rest of the budget process. Unfortunately, the motion to override the Mayors vetoes was inclusive of all items together. Councillor Dunfield and I moved to divide the motion to allow for individual votes on each item, but we did not receive the majority support of Council to do this. Given this situation, the vote to override the Mayors vetoes had to be considered as a whole. Given my support for some items and concerns with others as addressed above and below, I could not support overriding the vetoes as a whole. I will continue to advocate for this and seek alternative options to fund this work this fiscal year.
Use reserve funds to reduce Township tax increase by 2%	-\$282,722.00	Removed	Council passed a motion to take \$282,722 from our reserves to reduce the Township portion of the tax rate increase by 2%. I firmly opposed this decision as it is, in my opinion, fiscally irresponsible. Staff and the recent Asset Management Plan report have highlighted the need for Rideau Lakes to prioritize increasing our reserves to provide adequate fiscal room to accommodate our future capital investment needs. Off setting our tax levy with reserves when we do not have adequate reserve capacity to do so will have negative long-term consequences. It reduces our future capital investment capacity and gives a false impression of our fiscal position to taxpayers. With increasing costs, frozen MPAC reassessments since 2016 and few alternative funding sources it is important that we raise taxes at a responsible and reasonable rate each year otherwise we risk passing on either large single year tax increases or significant cost reductions that will negatively impact public services to future councils.

2. ALTO High-Speed Rail

- a. Our Council and the community has been busy over the past month organizing and meeting to develop a unified response to this project. Highlights include:
 - i. Council established a working group comprised of four Councillors (including myself) and up to 10 members of the public. This group has served as a critical coordination point between Council and several dedicated community members who have worked exceptionally hard over the past few weeks to inform our residents about this project, coordinate with other like minded community groups in neighbouring municipalities and lead the way in lobbying our federal public representatives.
 - ii. A very informative and standing room only public meeting organized by concerned Rideau Lakes residents was held at the Portland Community Hall on March 8th; attendance included our MP Michael Barrett.
 - iii. Council has distributed information notices by mail to all households to ensure all are aware of this project and the opportunity to provide public comment; a copy is attached above.
 - iv. Council has published a petition opposing the project in its current form. This petition can be accessed and signed here: [PETITION Against the Alto High-Speed Rail Southern Corridor Through Rideau Lakes Township Survey](#)
 - v. Council met with ALTO this past week on March 11th. Council was able to ask several questions of the representatives from ALTO with several of their responses providing clarification while others made clear that many details remain unknown. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend this meeting due to a previously scheduled work commitment. The video of this meeting can be viewed here: [Special Committee of the Whole - March 11, 2026](#)
 - vi. ALTO announced at the March 11th meeting that the current public consultation period scheduled to close on March 29th has been **extended until April 24th**. This extension is due in large part to the overwhelming public engagement received including the extensive response provided by communities such as ours along the Southern Corridor between Ottawa and Peterborough.

- b. Council will continue to lobby for our communities' interests regarding this project and in particular push for a public town hall with ALTO to be held here in Rideau Lakes.
- c. Bill C-15 – This bill remains in the Senate undergoing committee review. The last meeting was held on March 11th. Legislative details on this bill including videos of the ongoing Senate committee meetings can be accessed here: [C-15 \(45-1\) - LEGISinfo - Parliament of Canada](#). If you wish to provide comment on this bill it is essential that you contact each of the Senators individually; their contact information is attached above.

Please reach out if you have any questions, concerns or require assistance.

Cheers!

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