

2025 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF KINGSTON

Meghan Cowan

Aird & Berlis LLP

March 30, 2026

INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER'S MESSAGE

Aird & Berlis LLP was appointed as the Integrity Commissioner for The Corporation of the City of Kingston (the "City") pursuant to subsection 223.3(1) of the *Municipal Act, 2001* on December 7, 2021 by By-law No. 2022-4. Our services commenced on January 1, 2022. Our firm was re-appointed by Council on September 2, 2025 for an additional four (4) year term.

This is our third annual report and it will encompass the period January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025. This report provides an executive summary of our activities in carrying out our functions as the Integrity Commissioner for the City pursuant to our appointment.

The functions of an Integrity Commissioner are set out in subsection 223.3(1) of the *Municipal Act, 2001*, all of which have been assigned to Aird & Berlis LLP by Council. Our functions include both advice and education responsibilities as well as inquiry, investigation and enforcement obligations.

CODE OF CONDUCT

The City established its original Code of Conduct for Members of Council (the "Code of Conduct") on March 29, 2017 by By-law No. 2017-65 pursuant to Staff Report No. 17-094. The most recent revisions were made in 2021.

We had earlier worked with staff on proposed revisions to the City's Code of Conduct and Complaint Protocol. New draft documents had been prepared and have been reviewed and commented upon by City staff. However, the provincial government then introduced Bill 241 and, following the last provincial election, Bill 9, which provides regulation-making authority to create municipal codes of conduct and investigation procedures. In consultation with staff were of the view that the proposed amendments should await whatever changes the Province may make to the municipal accountability framework.

COMPLAINT / APPLICATION INVESTIGATIONS

Last year our office received six (6) formal complaints pursuant to the Code. We did not receive any applications pursuant to the *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act*.

Complaint 2024-06

Our investigation regarding Complaint 2024-06 remained ongoing at the time of our 2024 Annual Report. We concluded that a member of Council had contravened Section 5.1(e) of the Code of Conduct by making disparaging comments about other Council members in a public forum. We recommended a formal reprimand, which Council unanimously accepted.

Complaint 2025-01

We received a complaint citing an alleged contravention of Section 1.2 of the Code of Conduct, which provides that members are expected to follow the Code of Conduct, the Procedural By-law, and other sources of applicable law, and which lists several prominent legislative acts (e.g. the *Municipal Act, 2001*). We determined that Section 1.2 of the Code of Conduct is not intended to impose a mechanism for the enforcement of the various other statutes that are listed in the provision, and that Council members are not responsible for directly enforcing each of these statutes. The complaint was summarily dismissed.

Complaint 2025-02

We received a multi-faceted complaint, alleging contraventions of disrespect, lack of communication, and breaches of the Code of Conduct, including sections on the general principles, general obligations, discrimination and harassment, and respect for the Code of Conduct. Upon review of the submitted materials, we exercised our discretion to summarily dismiss the complaint, as we found no merit to or any evidence to support the concerns raised.

Complaint 2025-03

A complaint was filed against a member of Council alleging that the member had contravened Sections 5.1(a) and (b) of the Code of Conduct by using of racist terminology at a Council meeting. Upon review of the materials submitted and the recording of the meeting, we determined that the reference was connected to the discussion of Council at the time, and that the member remained composed, and restricted their remarks to that specific issue. We found no grounds upon which to sustain the allegation, and we terminated the inquiry.

Complaint 2025-04

We received a complaint alleging that a member of Council had misrepresented themselves to the public and to Council, and as a consequence, had improperly influenced various debates and undermined public trust. We reviewed the meeting recordings submitted, and determined that as the comments made were subject to open discussion in a public forum by those best positioned to evaluate their accuracy, there were insufficient grounds to make a finding that the member's statements were made with any intent to mislead Council or the public. This complaint was summarily dismissed.

Complaint 2025-05

A complaint was filed against a member alleging that they had not been responsive in answering inquiries from members of the public. We duly considered the complaint and all supporting materials and dismissed it on a summary basis given that our review of the evidence revealed that the member was sufficiently responsive.

Complaint 2025-06

We received a complaint filed against a member alleging that they had made disparaging comments towards staff during a meeting of Council. We considered the question of jurisdiction, as the allegations related solely to comments made by a member during a formal meeting of Council. We ultimately summarily dismissed the complaint on the basis that the alleged misconduct did not rise to such a level to merit our intervention by way of a full investigation.

ADVICE

Section 223.3 of the *Municipal Act, 2001* provides the Integrity Commissioner with express authority to provide specific advice to members with respect to their obligations under the Code of Conduct, any procedures, rules and policies of the municipality and local boards governing the ethical behaviour of members and the *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act*.

We received and responded in writing to eleven (11) separate requests for advice from six (6) members of Council in 2025 (no local board members asked for our advice). The inquiries related to various issues pertaining to the application of the Code of Conduct and the *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act*.

The Code of Conduct requests pertained to issues related to elections/campaigns, the rules on acceptance of gifts and/or benefits, and general member obligations. The majority of the requests for advice received by our office related to the *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act*. We reiterated in a number of separately issued written advisements that the purpose of the *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* is to prohibit members from engaging in the decision-making process for matters in which they have a pecuniary (i.e., financial) interest, be it direct, indirect, or deemed.

We remind members that the *Municipal Act, 2001* expressly requires that any requests for advice from members are to be made in writing. For the most part, members have respected their obligation to provide written requests for advice (and to include all relevant background facts and copies or links to supporting documents). This assists us in providing our written advice on the timely basis. We continue to attempt to respond in writing within 24 to 48 hours of receiving the information that is necessary to be reviewed in order to provide proper and correct advice to members on their ethical obligations.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

We did not provide any formal education and training to members in 2025. While we doubt that it has gone unnoticed that municipal elections will take place on October 26, 2026, we recommend that a comprehensive training session for all members of Council as well as members of the City's local boards be scheduled following the new term of office. We are pleased to have been asked to present a training and education session to Council during orientation following the election.

UPDATES TO MUNICIPAL ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

On May 1, 2025, the provincial government announced Bill 9, which essentially re-introduced the legislation originally proposed under Bill 241. Bill 9 proposes authorities which allow new requirements for provincial-wide uniform codes of conduct; mandatory education and training for Integrity Commissioners and for members of council and local boards; for the very odd involvement of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario; and for the removal from office and disqualification of members of council for egregious contraventions of a code of conduct, which result in harm to the health, safety or well-being of any person.

Bill 9 was referred to the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy which held a number of public hearings on the proposed legislation from May 28 to August 25, 2025 (we formally presented to the Committee on July 24, 2025). Only minor and rather inconsequential amendments have been made to the bill despite the majority of the evidence before the Standing Committee indicating that the proposed legislation was flawed and represented a lost opportunity to actually strengthen the local government accountability framework. Bill 9 was ordered for Third Reading on October 20, 2025. The provincial government had earlier indicated that the statute and the accountability framework will be in place prior to the regular municipal elections in the Fall and the commencement of the new term for municipal councils.

CLOSING REMARKS

We are privileged to be appointed as Integrity Commissioner for the City of Kingston and appreciate the trust that Council has placed in us. We will closely monitor Bill 9 and will report on any material and substantive changes that may impact the City, its members as well as our role as Integrity Commissioner.

Respectfully submitted,

AIRD & BERLIS LLP



Meghan Cowan

Integrity Commissioner for the City of Kingston

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Council Resourcing Review Working Group – Final Report to City Council – April 7, 2026

1. Recommendations

That effective November 15, 2026, District Councillor remuneration be set at \$53,550; and

That effective November 15, 2026, the Mayor’s remuneration be set at \$153,510; and

That beginning January 1, 2028, the annual cost of living adjustment for District Councillor and Mayor remuneration be set to the lower of the either the Consumer Price Index (Ontario) on the previous October 1st or the cost-of-living adjustment for the City’s non-unionized staff; and

That the annual budget for conferences, associated travel and living, and miscellaneous expenses be increased to \$65,000 in total, and the meal allowance while travelling on City business be equal to the most recent Canada Revenue Agency Directive on Travel: Appendix B – Allowances within Canada the Continental USA; and

That the annual discretionary budget of \$150 per District Councillor be eliminated; and

That the orientation for District Councillors and Mayor at the beginning of each term include training on time management as well as “Internet harassment survival techniques”, with training opportunities to be provided over the full term of Council; and

That the dedicated administrative resource provided to District Councillors be increased from the current one full-time employee to three full-time employees; and

That staff be directed to review the City’s website to provide increased information for people considering running for municipal office, including a description of the responsibilities and duties of the Mayor and District Councillors; and

That beginning with the 2026 – 2030 term of Council, the position of Deputy Mayor be extended from the current two-month term to a four-month term and that the monthly stipend be set at \$2,500 per month, and the City Clerk be authorized to add to a future Council agenda for all three readings the necessary amending by-law to *City of Kingston By-Law Number 2021-41, ‘Council Procedural By-Law’* to reflect the updated provisions regarding the Deputy Mayor position; and

That Council approve and give all three readings to the Council Remuneration By-Law, attached as Exhibit A to Council Resourcing Review Working Group Final Report, dated April 7, 2026; and

That the Council Resourcing Review Working Group having fulfilled its mandate, be and is hereby disbanded and the members of the Working Group thanked for their service.

2. Introduction

Over the past six months the Council Resourcing Review Working Group (hereafter the Working Group) has been reviewing the remuneration for City Council (which includes District Councillors (hereafter Councillors) and the Mayor), while at the same time preparing a recommendation on whether to move from a part-time to a full-time model. The two mandates are tightly interlinked.

Today Council positions are part-time. Despite that, on average Council members work well in excess of 40 hours per week, making the current remuneration low relative to the time commitment. While we considered recommending a significant increase in pay, we have opted instead to take an approach which provides increased resources to help Councillors to better manage their time and perhaps approach a weekly time commitment more in line with a part-time position, without compromising the quality of the services provided to the public.

The City is growing rapidly and is facing generational decisions in the coming years that will impact many areas including employment, industrial development, housing, the environment, and quality of life overall. As one resident commented “Kingston is no longer a one-horse town”. The demands on Council will only increase in the next few years. With the upcoming ward boundary review we are recommending that the question of part-time vs full-time, and the budget implications that may have, depending on the number of Councillors, be looked at as part of a broader structural review of Council. This, however, is outside of our mandate.

3. Background

On June 3, 2025, Council approved [Report Number 25-137](#), creating the Council Resourcing Review Working Group to review the remuneration for the 2026 – 2030 term of Council. The Working Group was mandated to examine the roles and responsibilities of the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and District Councillors and to make remuneration recommendations and administrative support recommendations based on a combination of both comparator municipalities and an understanding of what is asked and expected of an individual when elected to Council. The Working Group was also

mandated to consider modifying Council positions from considering the role to be a part-time to a full-time role.

This is the fifth time that a Working Group or Committee has been established to review Council's remuneration. The [Report of the 2022 Citizen Committee to Review Council Remuneration](#) can be viewed on the City website.

The membership of the Working Group consisted of three resident members, one former member of Council from a term no more than three terms prior to the current term and one member from KEYS Employment and Newcomer Services:

- Don Aldridge, Chair – resident member;
- Liz Schell, Vice-Chair – a former member of Council;
- Allan Scott – resident member;
- Rumi Sohal – resident member; and
- Samuel Tsegai – member from KEYS Employment and Newcomer Services.

The following municipalities were included in the list of comparator municipalities to be examined by the Working Group:

- City of Barrie;
- City of Brantford;
- Municipality of Chatham-Kent;
- City of Guelph;
- City of Peterborough;
- City of London;
- City of Greater Sudbury; and
- City of Thunder Bay.

The Working Group elected to add the City of Ottawa and the City of Toronto to the list of comparator municipalities. The following criteria was included in the staff report establishing the Working Group and used to determine comparator municipalities:

- Utilize either a Standing Committee or a Committee of the Whole model;
- Are similar in population (apart from Ottawa and Toronto);
- Operate as a single-tier municipality; and
- Have Councillors who are elected by districts/wards and are considered part-time (with the exceptions of London, Ottawa and Toronto).

Each of the comparator municipalities completed a survey providing the Working Group with information related to Council members' duties, administrative support, and remuneration (see Exhibit B – Municipal Comparator Data).

Additionally, the Working Group created an online survey and in-person interview questions for the current members of Kingston City Council. Nine Council members completed the online survey and participated in a 45-minute interview conducted by Working Group members.

The Working Group also created a series of questions to be used in the creation of a public engagement webpage on Get Involved Kingston. The public engagement ran from December 1, 2025, to January 5, 2026, and included social media posts and physical signage directing the public to the survey. The site logged 499 unique visitors and there were 246 surveys completed. (see Exhibit C – Public Engagement Results).

The Working Group met nine times from September 2025 to February 2026. During these meetings the Working Group engaged in discussions regarding the information from the comparator municipality survey, the survey and interviews with current members of Council, and the results from the public engagement conducted.

4. Remuneration

The Working Group began its deliberations by addressing the issue of whether the Mayor and Councillors should serve in a part-time or full-time capacity (see Section 6). After careful consideration, the group decided to maintain the part-time status for both positions. Following this decision, the Working Group turned its attention to reviewing the base salary. In the past, review committees have compared Kingston's salary levels for elected officials with a select group of similar municipalities, as outlined in Section 3. For this review, London was included as a comparable city, while Ottawa and Toronto were referenced for context only.

Although London is approximately three times the size of Kingston in terms of population, the two cities share many similarities. Both have a university and a community college, offer tertiary medical care to a broad region, maintain strong medical research capacities, and face the challenges associated with growing urban centres. London recently undertook a similar resource review, which resulted in the decision to treat Council positions as full-time and to compensate them accordingly. The current Working Group recognizes that London's approach may serve as a model for Kingston in the future; however, London was not used as a direct comparator when reviewing specific metrics.

With the above considerations in mind, the Working Group adopted a straightforward approach to determining remuneration. The starting point was the base salary recommendations established by the 2022 review committee. These amounts were then adjusted for inflation, applying a compounded inflation rate through to 2027, based on a projected rate of 2.2% for 2025 and assuming it would remain unchanged for 2026. The

2022 base salaries were \$129,000 for the Mayor and \$45,000 for Councillors. Factoring in a total compounded inflation rate of 19% results in recommended base salaries of \$153,510 for the Mayor and \$53,550 for Councillors. These rates are proposed to take effect on November 15, 2026, when the new Council is sworn in.

To ensure the proposed salaries are in line with prevailing standards, the Working Group compared these amounts with those of seven other comparator cities (excluding London, Ottawa, and Toronto). The analysis confirmed that the recommended base salaries for Kingston's Mayor and Councillors are consistent with the group of comparator municipalities.

We also examined the annual cost per citizen for both the Mayor and Councillors. For Kingston, these figures are \$1.08 and \$0.38 respectively. Once again, these costs are consistent with those observed in the comparator cities.

The data supporting these calculations can be found in Exhibit B.

The Working Group recommends continuing the current practice of adjusting salaries annually based on a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), beginning on January 1, 2028. We propose that the COLA be modified so that the adjustment is the lower of either the Consumer Price Index (Ontario) on the previous October 1st or the cost-of-living adjustment of the City's non-unionized staff. For 2026, non-unionized City staff salaries were frozen, and City Council also chose to forgo any increase. The proposed modification to the COLA aligns with this approach.

Determining the appropriate level of compensation for elected officials involves balancing several factors. While few individuals seek public office solely for financial reasons, the salary should be sufficient to attract qualified candidates but not so low as to prevent capable individuals from serving. If compensation were set at zero, the pool of potential candidates would likely be limited to those with independent wealth or retirees with adequate pensions. Conversely, setting salaries equivalent to senior executives in the private sector could create an environment where individuals are more motivated by retaining their positions than by serving the public interest. We believe that the recommended remuneration strikes a fair balance between these two extremes.

5. Other Recommendations & Observations

The Working Group was asked to review the position of Deputy Mayor. The Deputy Mayor stands in for the Mayor when they are not available and amongst other things chairs Council meetings and represents the City at community events. This is an important and time-consuming position that can also involve representing the City with other levels of government. In 2025 the Deputy Mayor had to step in for several months while the Mayor was on a leave of absence running for federal office. In short, this can

be an all-consuming position. Currently the position is filled on a volunteer basis for a 2-month term for which a stipend of \$250 per month is provided. Given the importance of the role of Deputy Mayor, we are recommending that: 1) the term be doubled to 4 months, and 2) the monthly stipend be increased to \$2,500. We encourage each of the 12 Councillors to take on this role once during their term in office; however, this should continue to be on a volunteer basis since not all Councillors are able to devote the increased time necessary to be Deputy Mayor.

The 2022 review committee set car allowance rates – our Working Group reviewed these rates and agreed that they remain appropriate. The rate set in 2022 was a base rate which has been adjusted annually based on the rate of inflation (the change in CPI). We are recommending that this practice continue.

We were also tasked with looking at the issue of enabling a more diverse Council – there is no quick and easy solution to this challenge. Many people are unable to make the time commitment to be on Council, even if it really were only a “part-time” obligation. Nor is everyone able to forgo the income that could be lost because of Council demands. Council, as it is currently structured, is not something that many people are willing and/or able to consider. That said, one of the early steps in encouraging a wider segment of our population to run for Council is to provide more online information about the roles and expectations (sample role requirements are presented in Section 9).

One of the challenges we found most disturbing, although sadly not surprising, is the abuse that Councillors frequently receive online – this is particularly pronounced for female members of Council. Anecdotally, this has been cited as one of the reasons that so few women run for Council. While we can't stop people from hurling vitriol from the comfort of their computer, we are making several recommendations that will help shield Council, including involving the police when serious threats are made.

6. Full-Time versus Part-Time

The Working Group considered whether Mayor and Councillor roles should be full-time or stay part-time. The *Municipal Act, 2001* does not mandate that elected officials rely solely on the income from their elected position and prescribes only a few professions that elected members are not able to hold while in office. Council members currently often work 40+ hours a week, which suggests a full-time workload on top of any existing employment prior to being elected. We recognize the pressure to control costs while maintaining high standards of service. Although further increased compensation would match the time commitment, we do not recommend it now, but perhaps in a future restructured governance model.

We also acknowledge the potential personal and mental health impacts of serving on Council. After weighing the pros and cons of full-time versus part-time positions and current pay rates, we recommend the roles remain part-time with matching compensation. To reduce workloads to something more closely approximating a part-time role, we suggest:

- Expanding the Council support team from one to three experienced City staff (apolitical and selected by a working group made up of 2 or 3 of the current Councillors), whose tasks may include:
 - Conducting research for Councillors.
 - Resolving simple issues.
 - Tracking public interactions via the CRM ticketing system.
 - Managing district social media.
 - Coordinating public events.
 - Implementing improved time management.
 - Other duties as appropriate.

Below is an analysis we undertook concerning the pros and cons of moving to a full-time expectation.

Pros of switching to (or recognizing) full-time councillors

1. Greater availability and responsiveness.

- More office hours for constituents, faster responses to issues, more direct oversight of City projects and meetings. Helpful when dealing with complex urban, university and rural issues.
- Council meeting held during normal office hours.
- Better crisis response and handling of frequent constituent casework.

2. More capacity for policy and complex files.

- Full-time Councillors can dive deeper into complicated files (housing, transit, climate adaptation, university relations, healthcare, ...) rather than relying entirely on staff briefs or delegating. This can improve decision quality and Councillor subject-matter expertise.
- Kingston is no longer a "one-horse-town" – as we continue to grow (rapidly, according to the YG220K initiative) the challenges we face as a city become more complex.

3. Professionalization and equity.

- If Councillors are paid and resourced more like professional legislators, it will lower barriers for people who cannot afford to hold a low-pay, high-time commitment job, thus improving diversity & representation on Council.

4. Reduced conflicts of interest.

- Councillors who must work a second job to make up income may have scheduling conflicts or outside interests – full-time compensation can reduce that pressure, assuming it is competitive with non-governmental positions.

Cons and risks of full-time Councillors

1. Higher direct cost.

- Salaries, benefits, office support and possibly larger staff/administration budgets. This is the most visible downside and a key political hurdle.

2. Potential for bureaucratization / distance from citizens.

- Professionalization can create a career politician class that may be seen as less connected to ordinary residents - risk of losing the “citizen-representative” feel.

3. Risk of centralization of power.

- Full-time Councillors might rely more on City staff and professional networks, potentially widening the gap between elected officials and grassroots community voices.

4. No automatic improvement in governance.

- Full-time status alone won't fix poor council culture, weak accountability, or unclear roles. Structure, committee workload, and support staff design matter more than a label.

5. Preventing some public servants from seeking election to council.

- Public sector employers may bar staff from undertaking a full-time council position (e.g. *Public Service of Ontario Act* restrictions on full-time employment and political activities that could interfere with the public servant's full-time job).

Pros of remaining part-time (i.e., modestly compensated) Councillors

1. Keeps Council rooted in the community.

- Councillors who work in the private sector or with community organizations bring grounded perspectives and direct community ties.

2. Lower direct municipal costs.

- Less pressure on the budget for salaries and benefits.

3. Encourages rotating leadership.

- Lower compensation can reduce incentives to professionalize politics, encouraging turnover and preventing entrenchment.

Cons of keeping the status quo (part-time expectation)

1. Accessibility and equity problems.

- People with caregiving responsibilities or lower incomes are less able to serve, narrowing the candidate pool and reducing representativeness.

2. Workload mismatch.

- Modern municipal work (housing, climate, infrastructure, intergovernmental relations) can be effectively a full-time job; part-time status may cause delays, overloaded Councillors, or create overreliance on staff.

3. Hidden costs.

- Overworked Councillors may produce slower decisions, require more staff hours to compensate, or introduce governance mistakes that carry financial consequences.
- Dedicated Councillors run the risk of “burnout” and may decide to not run for re-election – given the value that comes through experience and continuity this represents a large potential loss.

7. Conferences, Associated Travel and Living, and Miscellaneous Expenses

One of the ways that professionals in the business world keep current is through attending industry specific conferences and gatherings. The same is true for elected officials. In Ontario the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) annual conference is the primary place where representatives from cities of all sizes from across the province gather. Most members of Kingston’s City Council attend the AMO conference. Another relevant annual conference is held by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM); however, fewer Councillors attend the FCM conference primarily because of budget restrictions. In total, in 2024, Council spent \$46,943 to attend these conferences and related meetings.

These events are important for the City – understanding what other municipalities are doing, and learning from their best practices, benefits all of us. With this in mind, we are proposing a modest increase in this budget, making the 2027 conference and travel budget \$65,000 from the current \$25,000.

Related to travel is the daily meal per diem which was set at \$65 in 2022. We are proposing that this be updated to more accurately reflect the true cost of meals. We recommend following the Government of Canada guideline which is currently at \$112 and is updated periodically (i.e., use the most recent “Canada Revenue Agency Directive on Travel: Appendix B – Allowances within Canada and the Continental USA”).

This budget line item also includes several small miscellaneous categories, including telecommunications costs and office supplies not covered in other City budgets. The existing provision of \$150 per councillor per year for “sundries” is included in this budget, thus our recommendation to eliminate it as a separate line item.

8. Training

When Councillors are first elected, they participate in a comprehensive orientation program designed to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective public service. The initial training typically covers the structure and operations of municipal government, ethical standards, legislative procedures, and the fundamentals of policy making. New Councillors are introduced to key city departments, meet with senior staff, and receive briefings on major ongoing projects and issues facing the community.

To further enhance their readiness, we recommended that the orientation package include new modules addressing modern-day challenges. For instance:

- A time management techniques module would help Councillors balance their demanding schedules, prioritize tasks, and make efficient use of their time.
- Additionally, training on conflict de-escalation techniques, and how to handle abusive email can provide strategies for managing difficult communications, maintaining professionalism, and protecting their personal well-being in the face of online hostility.
- Police-led training on what conduct and situations constitute crimes that should be reported, and what interactions do not rise to the level of criminality requiring police involvement, would be helpful, and is recommended.
- A comprehensive review of the benefits to which Councillors are entitled, such as health and dental coverage, mental health assistance programs, pension plans, and professional development opportunities, should also be incorporated, ensuring that all members are fully informed about their compensation and support resources.

Beyond the initial orientation, the importance of continuous education throughout a Councillor’s four-year term cannot be overstated. Ongoing professional development opportunities – such as workshops, seminars, and conferences – allow Councillors to stay current on legislative changes, emerging issues, and best practices in governance. This commitment to lifelong learning not only enhances individual performance but also contributes to more informed decision-making and better outcomes for the community.

9. Role of the Mayor and Councillors

In conducting our review, we were surprised to discover that nowhere is there a description of the role and expectations of the Mayor and Councillors. While the current Council instinctively understands their roles, we feel that this should be documented on the City's website to set expectations for the public at large and equally importantly for those considering running for office. While the *Municipal Act, 2001*, in sections 224 and 225 sets out the roles, we offer the following with the expectation that the current occupants of these positions may want to make edits and are encouraged to do so.

Mayor:

- Serves as the chief executive officer and official representative of the City of Kingston.
- Presides over City Council meetings and ensures orderly conduct and adherence to legislative procedures.
- Provides leadership in setting strategic direction and priorities for the City, in collaboration with Council.
- Acts as a spokesperson for the City on civic matters, public events, and in communications with other levels of government.
- Advocates for the interests and needs of Kingston residents at regional, provincial, and national forums.
- Oversees the implementation of Council decisions, policies, and City initiatives.
- Works closely with City administration to ensure effective delivery of municipal services and programs.
- Represents the City at official functions, ceremonies, and community events.

Councillors:

- Represents constituents from a designated district within the City of Kingston.
- Participates in City Council meetings, committees, and decision-making processes.
- Reviews, debates, and votes on municipal policies, by-laws, budgets, and other matters affecting the City.
- Engages with residents to address concerns, gather feedback, and communicate Council initiatives.
- Works collaboratively with fellow Councillors and the Mayor to advance City priorities and projects.
- Serves on various committees and boards to provide oversight and guidance on specific municipal issues.
- Advocates for the interests of their district while considering the broader needs of the City.

- Attends community events and maintains visibility within their district to foster trust and accountability.

10. Recommendations for the Next Working Group

While conducting our review there were several occasions where we felt that a future Working Group would be in a better position to make a recommendation, possibly different than what we have come up with at this time. There were also a few cases where, with the benefit of hindsight, we might have done things slightly differently. The following observations are offered for consideration.

1. Revisit the question of full-time vs part-time. It might be more practical to do this in conjunction with a ward boundary review which is required to happen sometime during the next term. If Council were to be made full-time it is likely that the number of councillors would be reduced while the salaries would be increased – potentially resulting in a significant budget increase. A comprehensive review of the structure of Council may be appropriate for the Council coming into office in the fall of 2030, and may touch on:
 - a. At large representation vs by district.
 - b. Dedicated staff assigned to individual councillors.
 - c. Dedicated office space at City Hall.
 - d. A full-time Deputy Mayor.
2. There was some overlap between the Council survey and the interview questions that we generated – avoiding duplication of questions would have been more efficient.
3. We would have had a more effective public survey had we provide more context to the public (e.g., hours worked and current salary levels, as well as job descriptions for the Mayor and Councillors). We recommend not highlighting the median Kingston salary as we did.

11. Summary of Recommendations

Our recommendations are scattered throughout this report – they are consolidated here for ease of reading.

1. While not required as a formal motion, the Working Group is recommending that the City keeps the Council and Mayor positions as “part-time”, recognizing that while the hours are essentially full-time, the remuneration should be consistent with a part-time position; thus, measures must be taken to reduce the time commitment required of Councillors.
2. Starting November 15, 2026, the annual salary for Councillors be set at \$53,550, and for the Mayor at \$153,510. This becomes the new baseline against which an

annual cost of living adjustment (COLA) is applied starting January 1, 2028 (see recommendation 3, below).

3. Modify the COLA to be the lower of the Consumer Price Index (Ontario) on the previous October 1st or the average salary increase of the City's non-unionized staff.
4. Increase the annual budget for conferences, travel and living costs, and miscellaneous items (e.g., telecommunications and sundries) to \$65,000 in total. In addition, the meal allowance while travelling on City business should be equal to the most recent "Canada Revenue Agency Directive on Travel: Appendix B – Allowances within Canada the Continental USA".
5. Eliminating the annual discretionary budget that currently stands at \$150 per Councillor. This is included in the Conference, Associated Travel and Living, and Miscellaneous budget (recommendation 4).
6. While this is the current process, and thus doesn't require a motion by Council, we want to explicitly state that Council's benefits package continue to be updated to reflect the current schedule in effect. This covers medical, dental, life insurance, and pension benefits.
7. Also, not requiring a motion by Council, continue to adjust the annual car allowance to reflect the increase in the CPI from the previous year. This has been in place since 2022 and continues to be appropriate in our opinion.
8. As above, also not requiring a motion by Council, maintain the current cell phone policy.
9. Improve the onboarding training for new and returning Councillors. Include in the training units on time management as well as "Internet harassment survival techniques". A comprehensive onboarding training syllabus is already in place and is updated with each new term – we recommend extending training beyond the initial weeks of a new term and effectively establishing a continuous learning model. As an added note, include a module to be delivered by Human Resources reviewing the suite of benefits that Council is entitled to.
10. Increase the dedicated Council support staff to three people. Currently Council has one dedicated person supporting twelve people. We recommend a significantly expanded role for the support team with the aim to decrease the time commitment required for Councillors – if we are expecting these positions to be

part-time then at a minimum the option must exist for Councillors to reduce their workload.

11. Make the Deputy Mayor position a four-month term and set the stipend at \$2,500 per month to more accurately reflect the responsibilities and increased workload of the position. This position is on top of the day-to-day responsibilities of a Councillor. The current stipend of \$250 per month is inappropriate, thus the recommended increase. Councillors are encouraged to volunteer for this role once each term if they can accommodate the extra workload.
12. Enhance the City's website to provide more guidance for people considering running for office. This request was made in many of the public survey responses and is one step in towards making running for office more broadly accessible. This should be implemented as soon as possible given the upcoming election in fall of 2026.

12. Concluding Remarks

The working group was actively engaged for almost half a year (September 2025 thru February 2026) – it was an enlightening experience out of which we have gained a much deeper appreciation of the inner workings of our municipal government and the demands of being on City Council.

We were impressed, and encouraged, by the level of engagement that the citizens of Kingston demonstrated through the response rate to our public survey. Many of the comments we reviewed were very thoughtful – these helped as we formulated our recommendations.

There was also robust engagement with the current Council members, including the Mayor. Not surprisingly, the opinions they shared covered a wide spectrum; however, without exception it was clear that all members of Council are deeply committed to the City and to its people. We should also note that while everyone that we interviewed agreed that the hours exceeded those of a “part-time” position, all continue to be enthusiastic about the role they play and would recommend that anyone with an interest in serving their community consider running for office.

In conclusion, we would like to thank several people for their input to this review – the members of the public who responded to our survey – the members of Council who found time to meet with us and share their experiences – and a special thank you to City staff who conducted research, patiently answered all our questions, and provided overall advice and guidance to the Working Group throughout our journey.