



Rideau Lakes

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Rideau Lakes passes 2021 Budget

Chantry, Ontario, March 2, 2021 – Rideau Lakes Council passed the 2021 budget on March 1 at their regular meeting. The budget underscores Council’s commitment to its strategic priorities of Financial Sustainability and Infrastructure Planning, while continuing investments in Economic Development and Village and Hamlet Vitality.

The Township ended 2020 with an estimated \$1.09 million surplus. This was a reflection of the impact of COVID-19 delaying some planned projects, as well as stronger than forecasted revenue.

Recognizing the impact of COVID-19 on many taxpayers, Council limited the 2021 local tax rate increase to 1%. Additional relief is provided by property assessments being held at 2020 amounts by MPAC and the province reducing the education rate for businesses.

The 2021 budget includes revenue and expenses of \$18.6 million, of which \$4.63 million will be spent on capital improvements.

\$2.9 million will be invested in local roads. Full roadbed reconstruction will be completed on Plum Hollow Road and a portion of Hartsgravel Road. Reconstruction of the roadbed and improving drainage is critical to maximize the life of future surface investments.

\$1.4 million will be invested in surface overlays on existing hard-surfaced roads. This is part of the Township’s road lifecycle maintenance program. Overlays prolong the life of the road surface, extend investments already made and provide a better ride for drivers.

Council has also approved a plan to accelerate the schedule of maintenance stone application to gravel roads. The current program sees reapplication every 3 or 5 years, depending on traffic volumes. Starting with the 2021 budget, this program will move to a 2 and 3 year cycle.

2021 will see a major facility investment at the Ronald E Holman Municipal Complex (REHMC). The former OPP office will be renovated and become the home of the relocated South Elmsley library branch.

Work will also commence on a new outdoor recreation area at the REHMC. This recreation area will provide much needed greenspace access for this growing and most densely populated section of the Township.

Other community halls and parks across the Township will benefit from over \$600,000 in investment, of which \$300,000 will come from non-taxation revenue such as grants, donations and parkland reserves.

In partnership with the Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority (CRCA), the Township plans to improve a significant stretch of the Cataraqui Trail. Work is planned from Golf Club Road, south to the village of Portland. A Trail Head and Park-and-Ride is planned for lands purchased in 2020 at Highway 15 and County Road 5. Further, grant applications have been made for improvement to the Iron Bridge at Chaffey's Lock. The Cataraqui Trail is identified as the 'backbone' trail within the Township's Trail Strategy. It is a key recreational, community and active transportation asset.

Operating projects of note for 2021 include a strategic review of the Township's waste management program. The goal of the review is to prepare for the transition to producer responsibility for blue box materials (occurring in 2025) and to consult with the community on desired service levels and approaches to waste reduction and management.

2021 will also see the rollout of improved service standards for private road waste collection – resulting in a significant number of new roads receiving summer and/or winter collection.

The Township also continues to invest heavily in high-quality broadband. Local firm, WTC, will continue to build out a fibre-to-the-door network in Rideau Lakes. This is part of a three-year \$3.4 million investment by WTC, toward which the Township will contribute \$300,000 in 2021. The investment followed a competitive bid process undertaken in 2019. The Township continues to aggressively pursue other opportunities to enhance broadband locally, including multiple provincial and federal grant applications.

In accordance with the Township's 10-year Financial Sustainability Plan long-term debt will continue to decline in 2021. The Plan calls for normal course long-term borrowing to end in 2023, freeing up \$1.2 to \$3.6 million in each of the subsequent seven years. These funds, no longer required to service long-term debt, could be used to bolster capital investments, build reserves, or manage tax rate increases.

"The Township's fiscal future is bright. The 2021 budget continues our commitment to prudent spending and progressive rural governance," noted Mayor Hoogenboom.

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