CONNY GLENN FOR MAYOR OF KINGSTON — POLICY PAPER

Open City Hall

A transparency platform for Kingston

Information paid for by the public should normally belong to the public. Privacy, safety and legitimate legal confidentiality must be protected, but secrecy should require a clear justification and not be the default. Transparency is more than posting documents online. It should let residents follow a decision from the first outside contact, through staff analysis and Council debate, to the money spent and the result delivered.

My platform sets out eight actions that, taken together, build an “Open City Hall”: a City government where residents can see who is trying to influence a decision, follow the money, understand what happens behind closed doors, have a genuine say before decisions are made, and track whether Council's direction is carried out.

1. Make City Budgeting and Spending Clearer and Easily Searchable

Kingston should publish a searchable public record of: contracts and purchase orders above a reasonable threshold; successful bidder and contract value; sole-source and non-competitive purchases; consulting expenditures; grants and subsidies; land purchases and sales once negotiations are complete; and the actual final cost of major capital projects compared with the approved budget with explanations.

Kingston's procurement bylaw already allows Council to require reporting on major or higher-risk procurements. The next step is to make that reporting accessible to residents, not simply buried in council agendas.

Reference: Kingston procurement information.

2. Clear Reporting After Closed Meetings

Some matters must legally remain confidential, including litigation, labour relations and active land negotiations. But confidentiality should not become the default. After each closed meeting, the City should report: the general subject discussed; the legal reason for closing the meeting; who attended; whether direction was given; when the matter may return to open session; and what information can be released once confidentiality is no longer necessary.

Kingston's procedural bylaw permits reporting out after a closed session. I would make meaningful reporting the normal practice and require periodic review of old confidential matters for possible public release.

Reference: Kingston Council Procedural Bylaw.

3. Give Residents More Time Before Decisions

In practice, major reports and motions are often released only five or six days before the meeting at which Council votes on them. This is too little time for residents to read a report, understand what it means for them, and put together a considered response.

Major reports should instead be available at least ten calendar days before the meeting at which a decision is expected — roughly double today's typical runway. Late reports and substantial addenda should be deferred unless there is a clearly

stated emergency. I would get timelines adjusted to allow everyone to participate more meaningfully in decisions being made.

4. Make Consultation Genuine and Show What Happened to the Input

Residents have raised a fair complaint: too often, “consultation” means being told what the City has already decided to do, rather than being asked something that can still change. Real consultation has to happen early enough, and be structured openly enough, that resident input can actually shape the outcome.

I would require that for every public consultation staff state up front, in plain language, what is genuinely still open to change and what has already been decided.

Additionally, consultation would take place before a preferred staff option is finalized, not after, so input can realistically influence the recommendation; and where feasible, more than one real option would be presented, rather than a single preferred direction dressed up as a choice.

Consultation formats and timing must be accessible, with varied locations, times and online options rather than a single session at an inconvenient time. A summary of what was heard would be included in the report to Council, not published separately or after the decision is made, so that it is an active part of the decision making.

Consultation should not end with a statement that residents were “heard.” For major initiatives, staff should publish a response table showing what residents said, what changed, and what did not change and why. Delegations and written submissions should also be readily accessible alongside the relevant report, subject to privacy and accessibility requirements.

5. Create a Mandatory Lobbyist Registry

Anyone paid to influence a municipal decision should disclose:

- whom they represent;
- which elected official or senior employee they contacted;
- the subject discussed;
- the date and type of communication; and
- any relevant planning application, procurement or council decision.

The registry would cover councillors, the mayor, senior staff and applicable municipal agencies. Residents contacting the City about their own neighbourhood or personal circumstances would not be treated as lobbyists. The Integrity Commissioner could serve as registrar, as happens in Waterloo Region.

6. Move to Routine Disclosure

Residents should not have to file formal requests for commonly sought public records. Kingston should maintain a routine-disclosure catalogue, publish frequently requested records proactively, and report annually on: number of information requests; average response time; extensions; fees; refusals and reasons; and categories of records subsequently added to routine disclosure.

Personal information, confidential legal advice and legitimately sensitive records would remain protected.

Open City Hall

Information paid for by the public and decisions made on their behalf belong to the public. Privacy, safety and legitimate legal confidentiality must be protected, but secrecy should require a clear justification.

Transparency is about showing the work, answering the questions, and being open to scrutiny. Decisions made at City Hall carry impacts on the daily lives of Kingstonians. Opening City Hall ensures that residents understand those decisions. By allowing them to follow a decision from the first outside contact, through staff analysis and Council debate, to the money spent and the result delivered, Kingstonians become part of City Hall.