CONNY GLENN FOR MAYOR OF KINGSTON — POLICY PAPER

Running Kingston Better

A Business and Systems Approach to City Finances

Kingston does not need to be run like a corporation, but does need the financial discipline of a well-run business. That means knowing what our core business is and what things actually cost, using assets wisely, finding new revenue, cutting duplication, improving productivity, investing where there is a return, and planning far enough ahead that today's decisions do not become tomorrow's financial problems. Most importantly, it means bringing those decisions together.

Kingston already does much of this. The City has an Asset Management Plan covering billions of dollars in infrastructure, along with capital budgets, reserve policies, an economic development strategy, service reviews and long-term financial forecasts. But residents should not need to assemble a stack of separate reports to understand where their city is going financially, and Council should not treat decisions about growth, infrastructure, services, economic development and taxation as though they are unrelated. My financial policy brings those pieces together into one understandable municipal business and financial strategy.

The Fundamental Question: How Do We Build a Stronger City Without Simply Asking Taxpayers for More?

Municipal financial debates tend to start with two questions: what should we cut, or how much should taxes rise. Those matter, but they should not come first.

A business facing rising costs takes a different approach by looking at productivity and core services. Departments should look for ways to cut administrative cost, streamline processes, consolidate purchasing, improve scheduling, reduce energy use, apply technology effectively and redesign services. Savings should not simply disappear into the overall budget; they should be identified and reported. Residents deserve to know what changed, how much it saved, and whether the service was maintained or improved. That builds accountability while encouraging innovation across the organization.

I would ask different questions: How can we operate more efficiently? Are we getting the best return from our assets? Where can technology cut costs? What are we doing that could be done differently? Where can we generate new revenue? What investments today reduce costs tomorrow? Where can we grow our economy and tax base?

I would also ask: is this a core service? Pressures will always be brought to bear for the City to do other things. When the other things cost money and add to taxpayer burden, it is important for the City to ask itself — is what we are being asked to do part of what our community sees as our core business? If it is not, we require discipline to return focus to where it should be, providing the services and support that are mutually agreed upon core business. Core services will of course require review, but straying too far, especially without additional resources, only results in a lot of mediocre and poor services rather than excellent core services.

But it is only after asking those questions that we should determine what taxpayers need to contribute. That is the approach I will bring to City Hall.

1. Run a Leaner City — Systems and Technology to Reduce the Cost of Government

Lean does not mean cutting services indiscriminately. It means removing waste from the system. My professional background has taught me that poorly designed systems cost money. Duplication, unnecessary approvals, bottlenecks, outdated processes, disconnected technology and unclear accountability all consume resources without improving outcomes.

Kingston should focus on continuous operational improvement across the corporation, rather than simply looking for cuts. That means examining processes end to end: how many approvals does something require? How many times is the same information entered? Where is staff time going to administrative work that technology could handle? Where are departments buying similar things separately? Where are residents waiting because our internal processes are needlessly complicated? Where is overtime covering for a scheduling problem that was never fixed? Where could preventive maintenance avoid expensive emergency repairs? And where are we still doing something a certain way simply because that is how we have always done it?

Technology is one of the key tools to help us improve, but let's be clear about its use. It should not simply digitize existing bureaucracy. If we take a ten-step process and put all ten steps online, we still have a ten-step process. Before digitizing a service, we should ask whether the process itself can be redesigned.

Artificial intelligence, automation, integrated data systems, digital permitting and modern asset management technology can reduce repetitive administrative work, improve response times and free employees to focus on work that requires professional judgment and human interaction. Technology investments should come with measurable objectives: what becomes faster, what work disappears, what cost is avoided, what service improves, and what the payback period is. Modernization without measurable improvement is just another expense.

The objective is not fewer services. It is less waste between the taxpayer's dollar and the service the taxpayer receives.

2. Put Revenue Generation Beside Cost Control

We cannot build Kingston's financial strategy around controlling expenditures alone. We also need to grow revenue — not by turning every municipal service into a fee, but by thinking more intelligently about the City's economic position and its assets.

Kingston's 2026 budget raised the municipal portion of property taxes by 2.35 percent, plus a further 1.4 percent from external agencies such as Kingston Police, for a combined 3.75 percent increase, in line with comparable Ontario cities. That shows the limits of relying on the tax rate alone. Kingston should build a comprehensive Municipal Revenue Strategy that looks beyond the residential property tax base, including commercial and industrial assessment growth, appropriate user revenues, municipal assets, partnerships, leases, sponsorships, tourism revenue, investment opportunities where permitted, senior government funding and other sustainable sources. Every new dollar generated outside the residential property tax base is a dollar that can fund services, infrastructure or financial resilience instead.

3. Grow the Tax Base, Not Just the Tax Rate

One of the most important business principles I will bring to City Hall is the difference between raising the price and growing the customer base. Municipally, that is the difference between continually raising tax rates and growing the tax base.

Kingston needs a deliberate strategy to expand its commercial and employment tax base, treating economic development as part of the financial plan rather than a separate activity. We should identify the investment that strengthens Kingston's fiscal position and pursue it directly.

Kingston already has real economic advantages: great post-secondary institutions, Canadian Forces Base Kingston and the Royal Military College; Kingston Health Sciences Centre and Providence Care; a growing research and technology base; and a tourism sector built on the waterfront, the Thousand Islands and our historic downtown. Kingston has more Ph.D. graduates per capita than any other city in Canada, was named one of Site Selection Magazine's Top 20 Places to Invest in Canada, and was ranked the top small city in Canada for its startup ecosystem by StartupBlink. Our challenge is connecting those assets into functioning economic ecosystems rather than treating them as separate strengths.

More successful businesses mean more employment. More employment supports more households. More investment creates a larger tax base. And a larger tax base spreads the cost of running the city more broadly. Economic growth is one of our most important long-term strategies for keeping Kingston affordable.

4. Make City Assets Work Harder

A business does not just ask what assets it owns. It asks what those assets are doing. Kingston's Asset Management Plan puts the replacement value of the City's infrastructure at roughly $10.3 billion: $5.6 billion in core infrastructure like roads and bridges, $1.3 billion in facilities, $1.6 billion in other municipal services, and $1.8 billion in natural assets. Only about a third of that other-services category, covering things like parks, fleet and IT, is currently rated in good or very good condition.

Some of what we own is essential to delivering services. Some may be underused. I will introduce a municipal asset optimization strategy that asks: is this asset delivering the greatest possible public value? Could underused land support housing? Could facilities be shared? Could unused space generate revenue? Could partnerships let a municipal asset serve multiple purposes? Could a parking or transportation asset be used differently? Could municipal land generate recurring revenue while staying publicly owned? Could an investment unlock surrounding development and grow assessment?

The objective is not a fire sale of public property — quite the opposite. Selling an asset once produces revenue once, while using an asset strategically can produce public value for generations.

5. Create a Return on Investment Test

Not all spending is equal. Some spending simply consumes resources. Other spending saves money, generates revenue, expands assessment, prevents larger future costs or produces real public value. That distinction needs to be much clearer in municipal decision making.

Major investments should identify their expected return. Sometimes that return is financial, such as an energy retrofit that cuts operating costs, an infrastructure investment that unlocks millions in development, technology that reduces administrative cost, or preventive road maintenance that avoids far more expensive reconstruction later. Other investments generate social or community returns that ease pressure elsewhere. The point is not that everything City Hall does must make money. It is that the public and Council should understand what we expect in return for what we spend.

6. Bring Growth, Infrastructure and Revenue Together

Housing cannot be separated from infrastructure. Infrastructure cannot be separated from growth. And growth cannot be separated from municipal finances.

I want Kingston to move toward incremental infrastructure investment wherever technically and financially appropriate. Rather than automatically building enormous amounts of infrastructure today based on projections decades out, we should look at modular, scalable approaches that add capacity as demand materializes. Development should keep contributing appropriately to the infrastructure it requires. Once development occurs, new homes and businesses expand the tax base and generate ongoing municipal revenue.

That creates a cycle where we invest, unlock development, generate a greater tax base, strengthen revenue, and invest again — fundamentally different from borrowing to build, hoping and waiting for growth to arrive, and asking existing taxpayers to carry the cost in the meantime.

7. Treat Government Funding as Business Development

Kingston shouldn't be scrambling to build a business case after a funding program is announced. By then it's often too late to line up partners, plans and financial analysis for a strong application.

As mayor, I will build an active pipeline of projects ready for investment, aligned with federal and provincial priorities: housing, defence, climate adaptation, transportation, water and wastewater, healthcare infrastructure, active transportation, recreation and economic development. Each priority project will have a defined purpose, preliminary costing, potential partners, likely funding sources and measurable returns, ready before an application window opens.

This means treating government relations and grant development as a coordinated business development function, with City departments, Utilities Kingston, our community business organizations (KEDCO, DBIA, Tourism, and the Chamber), post-secondary institutions, healthcare organizations, community partners and the private sector working from one shared investment strategy. Public investment should be targeted where it can attract employers, expand a Kingston business, commercialize local research or strengthen a strategic cluster.

Defence is a prime example. Kingston is home to CFB Kingston, the Royal Military College, a strong research sector and growing capacity in cybersecurity, AI, quantum, health sciences and advanced communications. Canada's Defence Industrial Strategy aims to expand domestic production and supply chains — an opportunity not just for major contractors but for local small and medium businesses. As Co-Chair of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Defence Task Force, I'm working with municipalities across Canada to ensure communities with military installations are part of federal planning, since defence investment drives added demand on housing, roads, transit, water and wastewater, energy and childcare. FCM's position is clear: local infrastructure is defence infrastructure.

As mayor, I will use that national access, local expertise, and my business experience to position Kingston as a preferred partner for defence-related investment, building a defence and dual-purpose infrastructure pipeline, helping Kingston businesses qualify for procurement and commercialization opportunities, and ensuring federal investment at CFB Kingston delivers broader community benefit rather than leaving taxpayers to absorb the infrastructure pressure.

This is the approach I will use for healthcare, recreation, housing, roads, and other core city services — ensuring every priority project will:

- address an identified municipal need;
- align with senior government priorities;
- attract additional public or private investment;
- support local businesses and employment;
- reduce future operating or infrastructure costs;
- generate measurable economic, social or environmental returns; and
- be able to proceed quickly once funding is approved.

Not every grant is worth chasing, not if it commits the City to unaffordable operating costs or distracts from higher priorities. Every application should be weighed against our long-term financial plan and asset management needs, with full lifecycle costs and expected returns calculated up front.

I will bring Council a regular investment readiness report identifying priority projects, costs, required contributions, partners and funding prospects, so Council can make deliberate choices and set aside matching funds instead of scrambling when a short application window opens.

My work through FCM has reinforced what businesses already know: investment follows preparation. Kingston will compete better arriving with a credible plan and committed partners than with just another funding request.

8. Buy Better

A city the size of Kingston purchases enormous amounts of goods and services, and that purchasing power should be treated strategically. We should continually look for opportunities in consolidated procurement, multi-year purchasing, cooperative purchasing with other public organizations and municipalities, and better contract management.

The lowest bid is not always the least expensive solution. Lifecycle cost matters. Something that costs less today but requires more maintenance and earlier replacement can ultimately cost taxpayers more. Our purchasing philosophy should be best long-term value, not simply lowest initial price.

9. Manage Labour Costs Through Better Systems

City employees deliver the services residents depend on. A lean organization is not built by simply asking fewer people to do more work; that produces burnout, absenteeism, overtime and service decline.

My professional career has been built around understanding how people and systems interact. Good workforce management means looking at scheduling, workload, technology, absenteeism, injury prevention, recruitment, retention and workflow together. Sometimes the most expensive staffing problem is actually a process problem, and a better-designed workplace can improve productivity while improving employees' working lives. That is good management.

10. Build a Better Municipal Business Plan

All of this needs to come together. I will introduce a municipal business and financial plan connecting operating expenditures, capital requirements, infrastructure renewal, debt, reserves, growth, assessment, economic development, municipal assets, productivity, new revenue, water and wastewater capacity, housing, and provincial and federal investment.

Council should receive regular reporting against that plan, and residents should be able to see whether Kingston is becoming financially stronger or weaker. Instead of asking people to interpret hundreds of pages of financial documents, we should be able to answer a few basic questions: Are revenues growing faster or slower than costs? Are we becoming more productive? Are our reserves improving? Is our infrastructure deficit growing or shrinking? How much new assessment are we creating? How much outside investment are we attracting? How much revenue are City assets generating? How much have operational improvements saved? And are taxpayers getting better value?

That is financial transparency people can actually use.

The Difference Between an Economist and a Business Operator

Economic knowledge is useful to government, but economics and management are not the same thing. An economist can explain why costs are rising, how markets behave and what pressures may come. A business operator has to decide what to do about them.

You have to make payroll. You have to find customers. You have to generate revenue. You have to manage expenses. You have to know when to invest, and when not to. You have to manage risk. And when something is not working, you cannot

just explain the problem — you have to fix it.

I have spent decades operating in that world. My professional background in healthcare, ergonomics and human factors has also taught me to look past individual problems to the system producing them. Those two experiences come together in how I approach City Hall. Business discipline asks whether we can afford it, and systems thinking asks what else it affects. Leadership requires asking both.

Lean Government. Strong Services. New Revenue.

My financial approach is built around a more productive municipal organization and a stronger municipal balance sheet: control costs before cutting services; generate revenue before automatically raising taxes; grow the tax base rather than relying mainly on higher tax rates; use assets rather than simply owning them; invest where there is a measurable return; maintain infrastructure before it becomes more expensive to replace; use technology to streamline work, not just digitize it; compete aggressively for outside investment; and connect every major financial decision to a long-range plan.

Bringing It All Together

Many of these ideas are not entirely new to Kingston. Asset management exists. Long-range capital planning exists. Economic development exists. Budget forecasting exists. Service reviews exist. Reserve policies exist. Growth planning exists. Kingston already manages a $530 million operating budget and a $10 billion infrastructure portfolio.

The weakness is that these too often appear to residents, and sometimes to Council, as separate exercises. My change is to bring them together: one plan, one set of measurable financial objectives, one understandable picture of where Kingston is going, and regular public reporting on whether we are getting there. Because the purpose of financial leadership is not to produce more financial reports. It is to make better decisions.

My Commitment

Kingston has enormous potential, and we also face real financial pressure. The answer is neither austerity nor complacency. It is better management.

As Mayor, I will bring the discipline of someone who has run a business, the perspective of someone who understands complex systems, and the experience of someone who knows that numbers ultimately represent real decisions affecting real people.

I want Kingston to become a leaner organization, a smarter investor, a better manager of its assets and a more ambitious generator of revenue. The measure of success will not simply be whether we balanced the budget. It will be whether we built a stronger city — one with healthy reserves, manageable debt, well-maintained infrastructure, a growing tax base, more diverse revenue, efficient operations, strong public services, and the financial capacity to seize opportunities when they come.

That is how we stop managing one budget at a time and start building Kingston's financial future.