

OCTOBER 5, 2026

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THE BELANGER FACTOR

**RENFREW'S MUNICIPAL ELECTION
DECISION 2026**

No two elections are really going to be the same every time out. Candidates come and go, older ones aging out and newer ones just cutting their teeth.

But there are also third parties that make every trip to the polls something different. These third parties can range from political junkies — perhaps that's me — as well as vested interests of various sorts. And people who want to play the role of spoiler or disrupter. All kinds come out during election season.

Perhaps the biggest difference from years gone by is the woeful state of our local media. Once, when there was a printed *Renfrew Mercury*, voters could expect to see some sort of coverage of the candidates, their platforms, their experience, and their campaigns. Today we have none of that. The Mercury is dead and the Metroland thing that purports to replace it was, and still is, pathetic. We have a local radio station that has newscasts, but these are of the most superficial content, and their attempts at establishing an online news division are feeble. Perhaps they feel they can adequately cover a topic in less than seventy-five words, but I have to disagree. But they like to play the game and wear the clothes and scribble in their little notebooks.

Only the veritable *Eganville Leader* still stands, and while they're coverage is likely to be much more complete, they're more of a regional newspaper and have a large coverage area for news. Which means they can't very well be digging into all the weeds that may be out there in Renfrew's municipal campaign.

Other than lawn signs and websites and all the rest of it, voters don't really have too many places to go for information outside of what they're hearing in the coffee line at Tim Hortons, and maybe that's not the best place for a person to get informed on anything political.

People could always take the time to do their own research. I'm pretty sure all the chat boxes have plenty to say on the subject and about the candidates, but there are, of course, informational integrity risks to that.

Something, though, is new in the 2026 campaign and that's the emergence of a Facebook Group entitled *RENFREW ELECTION 2026* hosted by an individual by the name of *Brian Belanger*. I don't know Mr. Belanger, but I have heard that he got chased out of the Facebook Group *WHAT'S UP RENFREW*, which if true, isn't exactly a positive. I've joined the Belanger Group as an observer and have no intention of engaging with other members directly. For me it's simply an intelligence-gathering effort.

The getting booted rumour notwithstanding, and I have no idea of the credibility of that rumour, there is a little bit for me to find out about Mr. Belanger without doing the full five-star blue-ribbon creep of him and his past. His LinkedIn profile is actually mighty impressive, but when you boil it all down to a main thing, we basically find that Mr. Belanger is an accountant,

and apparently starred in several impressive positions in his career before retiring not long ago. It definitely doesn't come across as a guy who is going to be shown the door anywhere for poor behaviour. I don't want to necessarily stereotype accountants, but in my mind, people who work out their grocery budget on a slide rule are hardly going to be the type being bounced out of clubs.

But maybe accountants can have their own motivations as well.

That was my first thing when I came across his name originally. *"Hey, do you know about that Brian Belanger guy."* Or *"Did you see what that Brian Belanger guy wrote on his Facebook page?"*

Having never heard the name before, suddenly it was popping up as if everyone had just discovered the next Stephen King and were busy devouring his new piece of writing. So naturally, I had to check his work out. And as per usual, because I seem to have acquired a built-in suspicion of just about everything political, I had to assess what I thought were his potential motivations.

The writing on the group page is thorough, and the presentation of information quite impressive, but it has all of the hallmarks of been Ai-generated, something I don't think Mr. Belanger has ever claimed otherwise. So in that sense, it seems to represent a legitimate public interest spot. As I said, I joined the group, because I want to get a sense of what people are saying and feeling out there, and there is that.

A couple of candidates have also posted on the group page, and honestly, none of them look entirely good for doing so, with one candidate actually mixing it up personally with Belanger, while the others just left me with a sense of pandering. Bruce Rozycki jumped on with an information correction concerning Renfrew Hydro, but that was just making a correction. The other candidates definitely seemed to be hanging around to score whatever political points they feel are available to them. I suppose as politicians they want as much intel as they can possibly get, but at the same time, moving from a content consumer to a content creator by posting comments with opinions is a precarious play. You never know what kind of monkey you might be grabbing on to, and in a fight with a monkey, it only ends when the monkey says so.

Is Mr. Belanger simply playing the role of the neutral observer providing an innocent public service? My short answer is no.

He claims that he's intent on keeping his own opinions to himself, but then also says that as we draw nearer to election day, he will share his own selections with his group members. That is not a neutral observer.

The interaction with one candidate was unfortunate, but Belanger was in the thick of it. And while the encounter was unfortunate for the candidate in terms of tone, there was no question

that there was nothing neutral about Mr. Belanger's commentary, and it was very much negatively intentioned towards that candidate. We can quibble all we want about motivation, but if you're going to present yourself as a neutral observer, you can't very well be trading punches with mayoral candidates. It would also be good for mayoral candidates to avoid things like this altogether and flat-out ignore any provocations such as these. As to the validity of Mr. Belanger's points, I can't really say, nor am I smart enough to completely know or understand the way things went down with Ma-Te-Way and its aftermath. But when he fell into the barely disguised hostile interaction with a candidate, he crossed any line denoting neutrality.

That's just fair to say.



For me — man of suspicion — I think I smell a bit of a rat, and by that I'm referring to a situation and not a person. As I said, the information on the group page is useful in its way. But I still get this funny feeling that Mr. Belanger appears to be definitely engaged in this effort, and that a candidate or two might be at work with him.

If correct, that would turn his public service effort into a potential stalking horse.

And if that's the case, I honestly feel I know who. But I'll keep that suspicion to myself, at least for now. I feel I have a pretty good idea of who will be on Mr. Belanger's list when he makes it available later this month, and I'm absolutely convinced that I know he will be supporting and recommending for the mayor's chair in particular.

Belanger is really dialled in on the Ma-Te-Way fiasco, and there's no reason why he shouldn't be as a taxpayer. That's his right. But it's also a poorly-clothed effort in any mind to throw shade on all candidate who were involved with that debacle as it happened. And that's quite a few of them.

For example, if we play the Ma-Te-Way card, no fewer than three front-running candidates for the office of mayor go down the drain, leaving three remaining, one the owner of a local store with a pet squirrel, and one a former bylaw enforcement officer with the town who I believe was dismissed. Leaving just one real choice, which is awfully convenient for that single candidate. Just saying.

All I can do is keep an eye on that and hope that other voters, especially the eligible ones, do the same.

There are just under 300 people engaging with that group. In a tightly-fought race, things like this can be the difference between heartbreak or elation. With that many members, you've got to pay attention to him. Hell, even Warren LaRocque of Jackson Toyota is a member, likely because that business was mentioned often in Belanger's reports, especially in relation to council candidate Sandi Heins. And it didn't come off as complimentary.

Three hundred or so people doesn't sound like much, but when you lose by a dozen, as some candidate have in the past, you understand the importance and the depth of even small pools.

So, is Brian Belanger offering a legitimate and neutral public service or is he a disrupter, or even a stalking horse for another candidate?

Despite my suspicions, I can't really say for sure