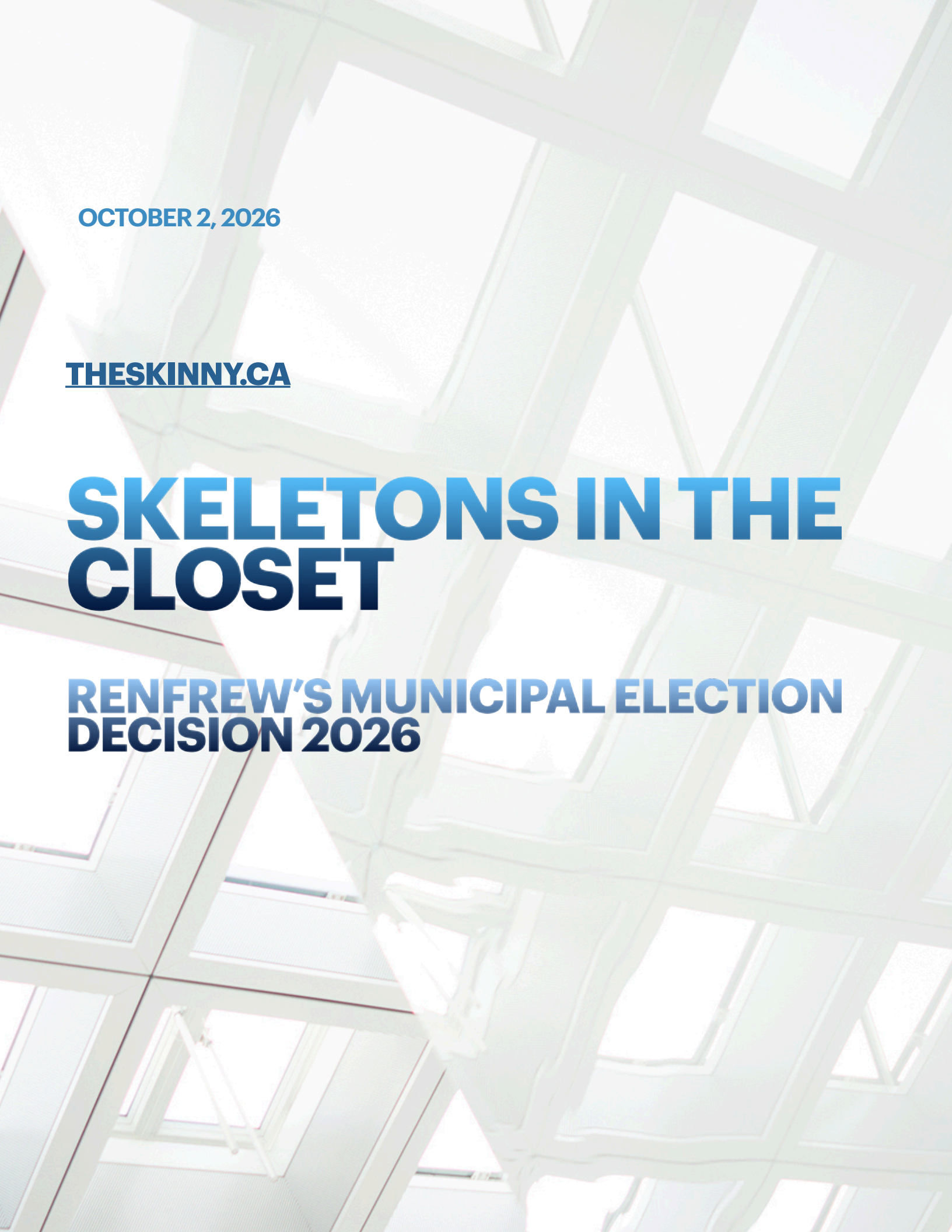




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SKELETONS IN THE CLOSET

**RENFREW'S MUNICIPAL ELECTION
DECISION 2026**

Try as we might, there's a generally accepted wisdom out there that it's extraordinarily difficult to out-run one's mistakes.

After all, that's what life is, a series of decisions, one after another after another for a lifetime, with their totality pretty much serving as a very long and complete résumé of a person's life and perhaps even their character. Many of those decisions will be good ones, hopefully far fewer will be bad ones, and the vast majority being in-between ones.

For better or worse, our decisions, and our decision-making, shapes the story of our lives and gives others points of reference for things like our outlook, philosophy, and even our political viewpoint.

Decisions stick to a person, hence the difficulty in out-running them. And if some of those decisions were major ones involving other people and other people's welfare, then it's only going to be natural for people to have a look at something like that when making key representational decisions of their own. So that means for politicians in particular, the past has a past to it, and some of it might be debatable, especially if a contentious and polarizing issue was ultimately decided upon, in part, by you.

We sin by commission and by omission alike. As the good Catholic prayer says, *"by what I have done and what I have failed to do."* So we carry with us a scorecard of sorts, maybe a report card in a pinch, and it outlines the "bad" things that we've done and the "good" things that we perhaps have failed to do. Acting in bad faith, negligently, and/or causing harm is a negative action, as is failing to do something when something is vitally required.

This whole thing can make or break political careers, and so politicians, of course, need to be attentive to it. People will and do look back at records of past major decisions involving major events, be they positive and negative. Finding yourself on the wrong side of one of these large waves of discontent can be perilous if not managed carefully and correctly.

As we all know, once people get something inside of their head, one way or another, it's generally a son-of-a-bitch-of-a-thing to get it back out again. So if somebody is pinning their vote to a single incident involving some degree of controversy, and you're a politician that was involved somehow in that controversy, then I'm going to say that it's flat-out impossible to get that person's vote in play for you ever again, that is short of running the guy's mother-in-law over with your new electric scooter.

It appears there are no shortage of issues in the current municipal electoral landscape that could cause vexation among the candidate pool. In English, that means that there are more than a few candidates who have past linkages to issues that have proven over time to be problematic. And people seem to have long memories.

The biggest of these, of course, is the whole Ma-Te-Way Expansion thing. I'm not going to get into that in any detail because I've already written about it in the past on this blog and a

quick visit to ChatGPT or some other similar chat box will more than provide enough information to help anyone educate themselves on this issue. There are also other blogs and Facebook pages and groups that contain information regarding the event as well. Just remember that chat-boxes don't always get it right, or entirely right, but I'm sure there'd be some sort of adequate coverage for anyone wanting to find out more.

The long and short of it is the fact that not a small number of voters are angry at this issue because it directly affected their bottom lines in terms of their property taxes. An expansion originally ear-marked as coming in at \$18 million ends up ballooning to over \$30 million or more, with some estimates claiming it might be north of \$50 million. Digging out from the impact that this has had on the town treasury and its financials will take many years, perhaps even decades, and property owners face tax increases year over year for the foreseeable future.

So they're pissed.

On the mayor's side, three candidate are unaffected by this issue, they being Jason Legris, Jeff Marquardt, and Callum Scott. In the race for councillor, it's John McDonald, Clint McWhirter, Andrew Dick, Kyle Cybulski, Guy Longtin, Bruce Rozycki, Hayley Heaslip, Scott Miller, and Kate Windle who don't have the burden of Ma-Te-Way hanging over them like a proverbial Sword of Damocles.

It's going to be important, I think, for incumbent councillors McDonald, McWhirter, Dick, and Cybulski to successfully differentiate themselves from the council previous to them that made all the Ma-Te-Way decisions during the expansion. The burden of these councillors is, as incumbents, they might get swept up in an anti-incumbent sentiment as poorly informed voters lump them in with that first group of decision-makers that came before them.

Also, these four, while not part of the Ma-Te-Way thing proper, had the responsibility for coming up with ways and means of "fixing" the "mess." Part of that fix required tax hikes to property owners with more to come. Unfortunately, being part of the group responsible for "*picking up the pieces*" may have many voters still holding them negatively accountable just by virtue of their incumbency. That, of course, doesn't come across as anything near fair, but as I said, once people form their opinion, it's a hell of a thing to change it, and it doesn't matter if the opinion is a valid one or not.

The argument that Ma-Te-Way is done and there's nothing more to be said about it has some merit, because life does move on and we're still going to have a Renfrew, so we might just as well get on with it as positively as we can. The argument is sound, as Ma-Te-Way is a done deal, and it's a hell of a facility, never-mind the back story.

But I suppose, if I wanted to be completely accurate, I should have said Ma-Te-Way is a done deal, except for the paying for it part.

Whatever your viewpoint is on this, there is more than enough evidence to suggest that this issue, fairly or not, has got some stick to it, and you can count on certain candidates really stoking those flames to their own electoral benefit. For those simply wanting Ma-Te-Way as an issue to go away, that's not so simple.



Because it's also coming to my attention that people are still miffed at the George Jackson Toyota crisis, and that was, like, twenty years ago. And there are still candidates for both mayor and councillor that are still on the ballot after having served on council during that time. If people are still pissed about Jackson Toyota leaving town for Horton some twenty years back, I don't think there's a snowball's chance that any candidate part of the Ma-Te-Way thing is going to find it easy to find comfort in the hope that the "water under the bridge" syndrome is going to come into play to their political benefit.

Remember the council that allowed a non-tendered and sole-sourced contract to go to a sitting councillor's business? It was part of a renovation of Town Hall, one that went over budget by over 100%. And somewhere in there, duly-elected councillors could not see an obvious conflict of interest in the awarding of the office furniture aspect of the contract. I

hope against hope that the councillor involved didn't vote on this, or the calamitous aspect of this would be hard to contemplate. Who were the folks sitting around that table at that time? And will there be any consequences applied to them for this on October 26th?

It goes on and on. The water plant. The municipal yard. Infrastructure decay. Pools and no pools. Ice pads. The state of repair of the roads. And yes, the taxes. And seemingly plenty more.

There are competing thoughts on much of this.

One big thing is the accountability piece, where people are held accountable for their body of work and the decisions — votes — they may have made. Nothing wrong with that as a concept.

But then there's the idea of forgiveness, where somebody has an authentic change of mind on something, or made their decisions in what they thought was good-faith while possibly being undercut by the flaws and failures of others.

Name me the person who hasn't made a mistake somewhere in life.

This concept targets the more Christian aspect of many of us, and falls in line with the thinking of almost all, if not all, world religions. It's very noble, and also very imprecise, because there are some people in the world who would be very hard to give a free pass to, although I don't think anyone on the ballot in Renfrew fits that bill exactly.

But the thing is, once people get mad, they're even more difficult to reason with, and opinions formed in anger tend to be very difficult to overcome.

I believe this is part of the reason I never became a politician myself. Because I'd probably suck at it and would have to wrestle with all of the decisions I made that pissed people off, just or otherwise.

No matter what, these issues with negative traction are still out there, and you can see them being discussed online. Some very good people are not going to be elected on the night of October 26th, and it may well be that one, a couple, or perhaps several of these negative items will be the reason why.