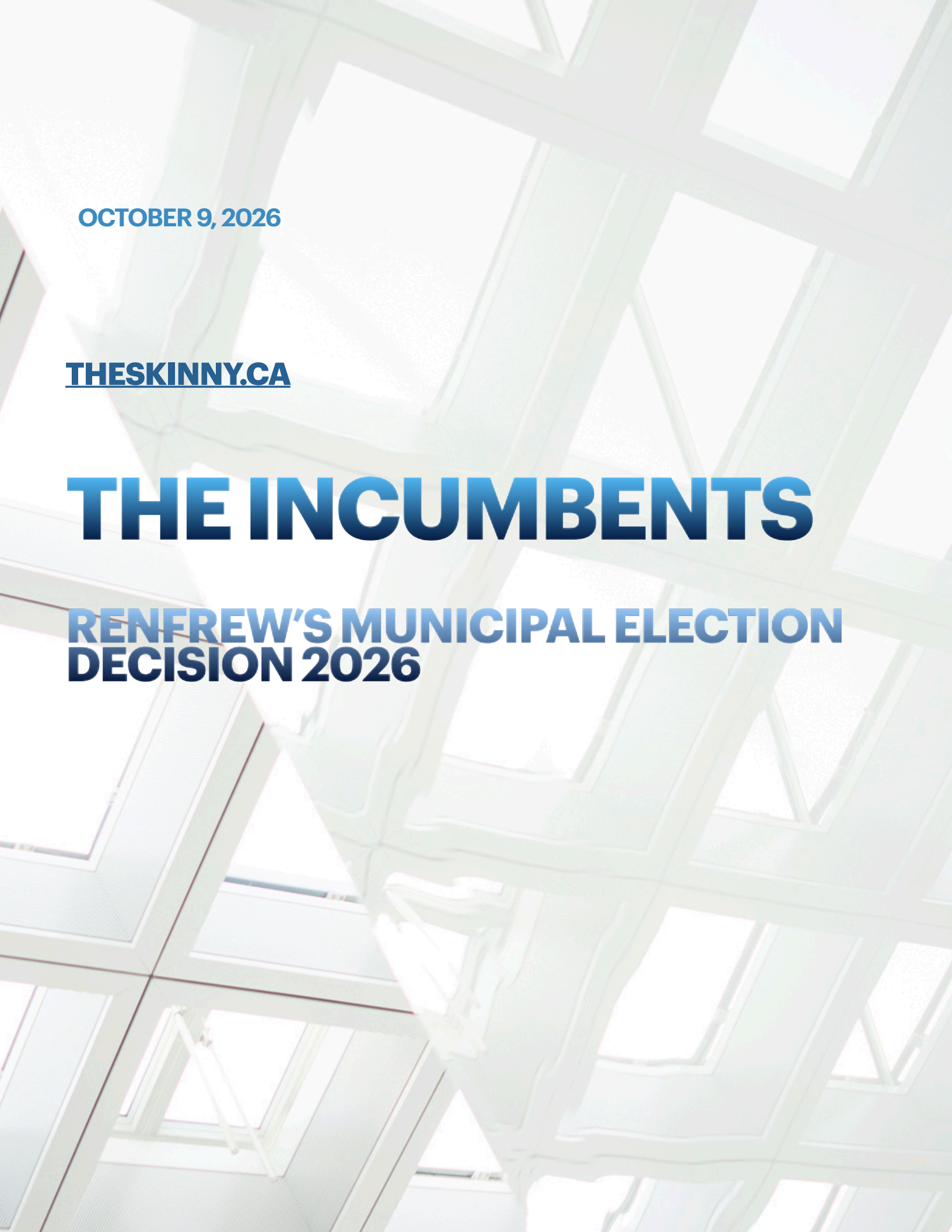




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THE INCUMBENTS

**RENFREW'S MUNICIPAL ELECTION
DECISION 2026**

Every member of the 2022-2026 Renfrew Town Council is running again for office later this month. Five of them are running for the jobs they currently hold, while two others take a crack at the mayor position challenging the current incumbent Tom Sidney.

On the councillor side itself, the four incumbents seeking to retain their place at the table are joined by six challengers, some of whom hold previous elected council experience, and others who have made marks for themselves in the private sector.

This is the manner in which I intend to observe these ten candidates for councillor, as either incumbents, as previous members, or as newcomers to municipal politics.

PART 1: THE INCUMBENTS

As mentioned, four existing councillors are defending their seats within the municipal chamber, they being Kyle Cybulski, Andrew Dick, John McDonald, and Clint McWhirter.

I know all four of these men and have observed them rather closely for many months during Tuesday night council meetings. I have to say that, based upon those observations, I happen to feel that the community would be doing itself no disservice if it were to re-elect any or all of these guys. Three of the four were rookies back in 2022, with only McWhirter having prior council experience in the past. And as McWhirter remained steady, I found the other three found their footing as they gained their own experience while the months and the issues ticked by.

Perhaps unfair praise given I will likely have less to say about some candidates than others simply because I don't know them. So moving forward, I'll do my very best not to sound like a homer for the four people I know better. And when I say I know better, I'm simply referring to the fact that I've seen these four in action often enough to form an opinion. I am not, however, a member of any Friday night poker games that any of these people may be throwing from time to time, so I like to think that my assessment has more integrity than simply saying I "know" someone.

KYLE CYBULSKI: (1,506 votes in 2022)

Everybody has a sense of humour, and Kyle Cybulski's no different. But more often than not, when in chambers and at work grappling with municipal issues, Cybulski is a very serious dude. As a newcomer back in 2022, he was one of the councillors that went after Tom Sidney and Peter Emon for their roles in the Ma-Te-Way issue. That included a demand that Mayor Sidney resign — he didn't — and committee work was stripped from those two council members.

Obviously, if there's such a thing as a *Post Ma-Te-Way Bloc*, Mr. Cybulskii could legitimately be considered as one of its members. That expansion fiasco, resulting in an overrun in the tens of millions of dollars, had the new councillors coming into their new positions only to be

side-swiped by the degree of damage that Ma-Te-Way seemed to represent early in their terms.

During this past year's budget deliberations — onerous because of Ma-Te-Way costs and other problems — Cybulski led an almost line by line assessment of the budget, having prepared his deliberations in advance of presenting them to council. The result was methodical and deliberate, and I'm positive that his leadership in this regard had a positive effect on the budget despite that document not being a very positive one to begin with.



I think if Mr. Cybulski were to experience any difficulty in getting re-elected, it may be as a result of voters erroneously “punishing” all incumbents thinking that they were all part of the Ma-Te-Way madness. That, unfortunately, may well be at play for the other three incumbents as well, since Ma-Te-Way may stick to them even though they had nothing to do with it and weren't there. The irony around this kind of misfortune would be that all four of the incumbents are strong proponents for accountability around Ma-Te-Way. In short, all four, upon election, simultaneously discovered that they had been served up a shit sandwich. It would be too bad if any of these people get “punished” by a poorly informed, or partially informed, electorate.

Mr. Cybulski was investigated by the integrity commissioner for a Facebook post he made involving a municipal issue. I suppose his crime was the breaking of post-vote “solidarity,” the process by which all councillors get behind a recorded vote in public showing council unity, even if some of them voted against and fervently disagreed with the result

ANDREW DICK: (1,258 votes in 2022)

Easily the most colourful of our local councillors in both speaking style and wardrobe choices, and that was far from being meant as a bad thing.

Andrew Dick is a populist of sorts, and he has his ear to the ground for things out in the community that are rankling the residents, especially as they involve the municipality proper. As with the other three incumbents, Mr. Dick is a full voting member of the *Post Ma-Te-Way Bloc*, an arrangement of councillors intent upon finding answers and accountability around Ma-Te-Way.

And not just Ma-Te-Way.

Like the others, Andrew gave a lot of time towards fiscal probity, especially in the face of the Ma-Te-Way blow to taxpayers. A proponent of efficiency and thoroughness, Dick always had his antennae up when the town's money was involved, especially if it was involved in a manner that far exceeded what it was meant to be. So when it came to roads and

engineering and the constant project overruns due to previously unmapped buried infrastructure, Mr. Dick was always in the thick of it, asking plenty of questions, and sometimes having to wade through often unintelligible or confusing answers.

When he didn't get satisfaction on his questions with sub-standard responses from staff, he pushed back, sometimes to his own detriment. Once for sure, and maybe twice, Dick was investigated by the integrity commissioner for remarks made in-session while being frustrated with staff responses. He said some things that got under the collar of some staff and some other councillors, and they acted on it by calling in the IC. He was reprimanded by the commissioner, but the council itself decided to take no further "corrective" action.



Mr. Dick is the *Chief Apologizer* within the current council as he apologizes for something or another pretty much every time out, and maybe twice on busy days. I don't mean the stereotypical Canadian apology that we're know for worldwide, the one where we apologize for all sorts of things as a matter of course. Dick has two different kinds of apologies he likes to run with, one for the crusty words and comments made in the heat of the moment, and others as expressions of empathy for residents who are facing difficulties navigating the processes of Town Hall. He would often interact and directly address audience members and people who were coming in to make a delegation, or representation of some important topic or issue. And where the affront was egregious, he would offer his own personal apology for the treatment to the aggrieved party or parties.

Like the others, Dick is really intent upon cleaning stuff up, especially in the way things are done and the amount of money expended to do them. So fiscal health, good governance, and the bottom line are all things that are going to be important to Andrew Dick.

JOHN McDONALD: (1,615 votes in 2022)

If there's such a thing as sheer presence, John McDonald's got it. Coming through the door at maybe 6'6" or maybe more, the strapping ex-police officer is hard to miss. One time he dropped a pen on the floor and went down to retrieve it. Kyle Cybulski then noted that "*even when you're on one knee you still tower over the rest of us.*"

Mr. McDonald is a mild-mannered politician with an easy way about him that makes interacting with him worth the effort. He is unfailingly positive in the way that he approaches his responsibilities, and even in moments of heated frustration around the table, he can be relied upon to keep his cool, or maybe better put, keep his discipline.

He too is a member of the Post-Ma-Te-Way grouping, and he participated in the accountability measures directed toward the mayor and the reeve. There was some testiness

in the early going between McDonald and Peter Emon, one event triggering an investigation of Emon by the integrity commissioner. That said, the two have seemed to have stepped back from that, and appear to work well within the context of the current group.

He comes across to me as even-tempered and professional in bearing and in action, and he appears at each meeting, and I assume at each committee, thoroughly prepared and aware of all files in front of him. His questioning of individuals, whether they be staff or other politicians, is always respectful while at the same time being deliberate.



In short, the man is no fool, and coupled with his preparation and delivery, I can only conclude that this is an individual who puts in a full day's work every day, regardless of where he may be and what he may be doing. And I have to say that such a disposition certainly benefits the town.

Another rookie in 2022, McDonald developed into a legitimate top-notch councillor who seems to hit most of the right notes, if not all of them.

As with the other three, John McDonald is someone I believe will be a formidable candidate in an attempt to retain his current seat.

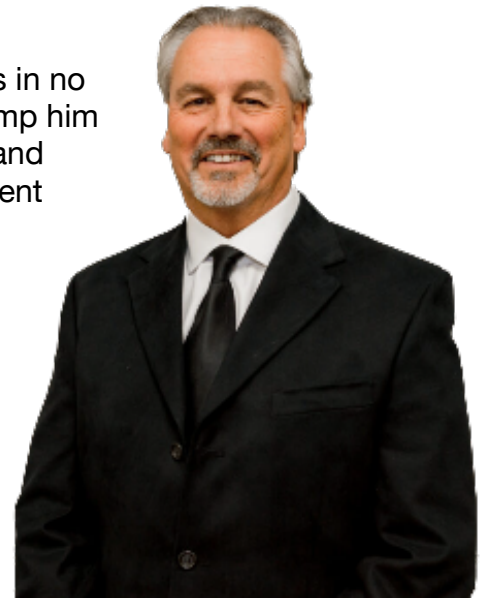
CLINT McWHIRTER: (1,615 VOTES IN 2022)

Clint McWhirter has been on council before, in fact several times. But one of the times he wasn't successful was back in the election of 2018, when voters returned a fairly veteran council. I can't seem to dig up the candidate vote counts for that election, but as a veteran himself, I feel McWhirter wouldn't be terribly far behind the candidate snagging the last spot, Tom Sidney. Sidney would go to be the head of the Parks and Recreation Committee and become embroiled heavily in the Ma-Te-Way debacle. Clint McWhirter would go home unsuccessful, but in retrospect, perhaps Lady Luck was shining on Ol' Clint that night. Because being an unsuccessful candidate, he dodged being a part of the group that would have Ma-Te-Way sticking to them like a dog on a mail carrier's pant leg.

Now, you never know. Maybe the presence of a Clint McWhirter may have been a difference-maker. Clint has experience and is well-versed on the way things are to be done and the protocols to be followed, so it's not out of the realm of possibilities that his presence might have had a mitigating effect. He's not afraid to ask tough questions, and I can't see him sitting there when all that stuff was going on and just going along with the crowd and saying nothing. But then again, every one of those elected councillors had a lot of experience, and it's nothing short of amazing that the Ma-Te-Way unravelling seems to have got past all of them. So there's no telling that Clint's presence would have made a difference at all. The only important thing, as far as Mr. McWhirter might be concerned, is that he was indeed not

there, and the scandal — if that's a legitimate way of framing it — is in no part his. But like all four incumbents, an ill-informed voter might lump him in with the members of the Ma-Te-Way council, which while unfair and unfortunate, is something that can definitely happen to any incumbent incorrectly associated with the previous council.

McWhirter can always be counted upon to show up prepared and willing to engage. He does so positively and respectfully, and in no way will he be ignored. While even-tempered and a measured speaker, he can and will ask those tough questions, and if he doesn't get the response he's looking for, he's prepared to ask it again until he gets something closer to the desired result. He, too, carries a professional bearing, and even in some moments of possible acrimony, continues to display that disciplined bearing even when challenged by some issue or some other individual.



McWhirter is also part of the *Post Ma-Te-Way* group, the councillors seeking answers and accountability for Ma-Te-Way. As part of that effort, he as well voted for sanctions on the mayor and reeve for their participation in the Ma-Te-Way issue as part of their membership on the previous council. And I believe he supported the effort calling for Tom Sidney to resign as mayor.

Of all the incumbent councillors, Clint McWhirter had the biggest turnout in 2022, receiving 1,615 votes, just four shy of frontrunner Jason Legris, who is now running for mayor, but just 29 votes ahead of the third-place finisher, John McDonald. That, to me, indicates a solid base, or foundation to build upon.

Again, as with all the incumbents, I don't feel Renfrew residents would be making a mistake in returning Clint McWhirter to office.

Plus, he's got the best hair on council.