Wayne Carpenter
24 Normandie Court
Rexton, New Brunswick

January 06, 2026

Mayor and Members of Council
Village of Five Rivers
c/o Chief Administrative Officer

Dear Mayor and Members of Council,

I am writing further to my correspondence in early 2025 regarding concerns with the municipal budget process and the lack of transparency, public consultation, and strategic planning underpinning recent budgets. As we now approach the 2026 budget, it is evident that many of the same concerns remain unresolved.

At the time of my previous letter, I raised issues relating to the absence of meaningful community and business engagement, limited public access to council deliberations, the overuse of closed meetings, and the lack of guiding strategic documents such as an Economic Development Plan, Asset Management Plan, and Recreation Plan. Regrettably, there is little evidence that these deficiencies have been addressed in the lead-up to the 2026 budget.

Of particular concern is the fact that, to date, no 2026 budget materials or timelines have been made publicly available, nor have residents been afforded an opportunity to provide input prior to key financial decisions being shaped. A municipal budget is not merely an accounting exercise; it is a policy document that establishes priorities, allocates resources, and commits future councils and taxpayers to long-term obligations.

This concern is heightened by the continued lack of transparency surrounding non-discretionary expenditures arising from regional decision-making. The Mayor remains the sole representative at Kent Regional Service Commission meetings where significant financial commitments are discussed. However, council and the public receive only minimal, itemized meeting summaries, with no substantive reporting on discussions, implications, or decisions that affect municipal finances. These matters are neither meaningfully discussed at regular council meetings nor reflected in publicly accessible minutes.

Equally troubling is that 2026 is a municipal election year. Decisions made by the current council will bind a future council whose composition may differ significantly following the election. In such circumstances, best practices in municipal governance call for heightened transparency, robust public engagement, and caution in making long-term financial commitments without a clear electoral mandate.

While I acknowledge the administrative challenges faced by council and staff, and the need to maintain essential services, continuity of operations cannot substitute for strategic direction, public accountability, or democratic participation. The ongoing absence of accessible planning documents and open consultation raises legitimate concerns about whether the community's priorities are being reflected in budget decisions.

I respectfully urge council and the CAO to:
- Publicly release draft 2026 budget information and timelines;
- Provide structured opportunities for public and business input prior to budget approval;
- Improve substantive reporting to council and the public on regional service commission matters;
- Clarify how current budget decisions may impact future councils and taxpayers.

The residents of Five Rivers deserve a budget process that is transparent, participatory, and forward-looking—particularly in an election year when trust in local governance is paramount.

I look forward to your response and to seeing meaningful steps taken to address these longstanding concerns.

Respectfully,

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Dear Mayor and Members of Council,

This letter is submitted as an addendum to my correspondence regarding concerns with the 2026 budget process.

I note that, at a regular meeting of Council held on November 12, 2025, Council passed a motion approving the 2026 operating budget, warrant, and tax rates as presented. While I acknowledge that the formal adoption of an annual operating budget is a statutory requirement, the circumstances surrounding this approval are of significant concern.

Specifically, the approval of the 2026 operating budget occurred without any clearly documented or publicly accessible draft budget materials, without structured opportunities for public or business consultation prior to adoption, and without a publicly recorded summary of substantive council deliberation on budget priorities. Any budget summary that was later released does not substitute for meaningful public engagement before decisions are finalized.

This sequence of events reinforces the concerns I raised previously regarding transparency, public participation, and accountability in the budget process. When budgets are approved before residents have an opportunity to review and comment on proposed allocations, the public is effectively excluded from influencing decisions that directly affect taxation levels, service delivery, and long-term municipal obligations.

The timing of this approval is particularly troubling given that 2026 is a municipal election year. Budgetary decisions made by the current council will bind a future council whose composition may change following the election. In such circumstances, enhanced transparency and public engagement are not merely best practices—they are essential to maintaining public trust in local governance.

This addendum is intended to ensure that the approval of the 2026 operating budget, and the process by which it was adopted, are clearly noted on the public record as part of my ongoing concerns regarding municipal governance in Five Rivers.

Respectfully submitted,

Wayne Carpenter
Rexton, New Brunswick