



Budget 2022



Mayor's Speech

January 31, 2022
Check Against Delivery



Managing Better to Better Serve

Good evening,

One of the very first decisions by this new Municipal Council was to defer the review and adoption of its 2022 Budget by a few weeks. This extra time proved to be invaluable, giving elected officials the chance to learn all about the ins and outs of municipal finances, to familiarize themselves with certain issues and to start working with the administration in order to gain a better feel for the municipal machinery.

Mostly, this extra time made it possible to reach **unanimous consensus on a program** for the Council that provides a vision for this new mandate. Seven main orientations were identified:

1. Promote Gatineau as a place to live given its culture, inclusiveness and heritage;
2. Encourage and promote participation by residents;
3. Exercise proactive leadership consistent with our status as the fourth largest city in Quebec;
4. In light of the climate emergency, structure our interventions around a science-based and ambitious approach to adapting to climate change and reducing GHG emissions;
5. In a context of economic revival, focus on strategic investments in the downtown and the different sectors to galvanize our economy into sustainable growth;
6. Maintain accelerated investments in municipal infrastructures in line with our needs and priorities; and
7. Introduce best practices in regard to transparency, efficiency and accountability.

This logical sequence enabled the Council to put its stamp on the budget. The ensuing budget exercise turned into a productive one, **aligned as it was with Gatineau's strategic planning and your priorities**. In the end, the deferral gave you a little break by postponing tax payments to March instead of after the holidays!

As befits our principle of **transparency**, and despite the context of the pandemic, the budget review week was webcast between January 10 and 14. Despite the fact that the discussions were held virtually, there were several in-depth debates around the choices to be made. Once again, this exercise was an exceptional opportunity for you and the media to delve into the heart of the municipal machinery, to better understand the issues and their solutions, to get a sense of what people feel most strongly about, and to reach an informed opinion about your city's financial health.

Organizing and acting like a big city

Gatineau became a city 20 years ago. Born of the merger of the former cities of Buckingham, Masson-Angers, Gatineau, Hull and Aylmer, the new city rose to fourth place among the largest municipalities in Quebec. Welcoming, prosperous and multicultural, Gatineau has since become known for offering a quality of life that is among the best in the country, and one of the reasons why people choose to live here. Gatineau is first in Canada and fifth in the world for its bike paths! Gatineau ranks second in Quebec, after Montréal, in terms of welcoming newcomers. In fact, immigrants make up 11% of our population.

Gatineau now has more than 290,000 inhabitants, and our numbers keep increasing. We are growing steadily, and projections indicate an upward trend that should continue for the next 25 years.

At the same time,

- Gatineau is third in terms of its tax burden, which is more than \$300 less than the average for major cities in Quebec, and the difference keeps growing;
- There are challenges in terms of getting major structuring projects off the ground;
- We remain dependent on property taxes. It is essential that we diversify revenues and revise our financial strategies.
- It took 20 years for Gatineau to offer you more flexibility in paying your taxes.

We need ways to deliver results, major projects and even better adapted services, and to better support our economic development. That means having the courage to challenge how we do things.

Significant changes will have to be made if we are to have a more modern and agile administration by the end of this mandate. We will have to manage like a big city and find a way to better tap our growth and technologies, and **keep improving our approach to you, the residents**. That's what managing better to better serve comes down to.

Improved governance

Over the years, there has been talk of cultural, sports and community infrastructure projects. In many cases, millions of dollars were set aside and budgeted for each of those projects, without a clear sense of how much they could really cost or when the money would actually become available. The money was earmarked or frozen until the project could be carried out...

The Municipal Council has asked the administration to propose another way of managing infrastructure projects.

I would like to reassure you that the funds allocated to priority projects are still there! We simply transferred the amount projected for each of those projects into one big envelope. And now, we will proceed with the necessary studies to determine **how much, when and what it will take** to get everything on our grocery list. This envelope initially held \$37 M.

Of that, \$8 M has been transferred to infrastructure maintenance. That leaves \$29 M, which we intend to grow by being more proactive in identifying federal and provincial grants to which we would be entitled.

Thus, in addition to moving ahead on certain fronts, namely feasibility studies, we will be better able to package our projects and apply for certain government grants and contributions along the way. It will also give us more room for manoeuvre in terms of the fluidity of our capital funds.

This new approach will mean smaller tax increases for you than in previous years. The 2022 tax increase of 1.9% is one of the smallest since the merger 20 years ago. I am proud of this because it was one of my campaign commitments.

Our long-term financial plan will formalize our ability to fund our priority projects in the coming months. This is an essential planning tool that will enable us to redefine certain financial parameters for the future. **From now on, we will avoid blue-sky promises and stick to timely promises.**

Running the municipal machinery more efficiently does not necessarily mean injecting more money into it, but rather seeing it with new eyes, stepping outside one's comfort zone and doing things differently.

Our role as elected officials is to be, among other things, the custodians of our strategic planning, regulatory frameworks and master plans. It also means improving our policies and encouraging more participation by our residents and better communication with them.

This is why I want to thank Council members for having had the courage to review this management before anything else. **To manage before taxing.**

Enhancing services

This budget is about enhancing services, which comes to \$4.8 M. This is the biggest increase in this regard in many years! The strength of the real estate market, along with revenues from land transfer taxes, will allow for additional investments this year. These investments will essentially be for urban outdoors, youth, vulnerable households, snow clearing, various environmental initiatives and neighbourhood associations.

The Municipal Council is maintaining assistance to vulnerable households for access to housing, particularly when those families find themselves homeless due to a housing shortage. This year's budget has \$130,000 earmarked for this.

The **Stratégie municipale d'action jeunesse** will receive \$656,000 for its 2022-2024 three-year action plan. The Commission jeunesse will also have to set in place a program under a \$50,000 grant to give Gatineau youth the opportunity to propose **Wow initiatives**.

The **urban outdoor action plan** will receive \$431,080 dollars further to the funding plan presented in 2019.

Gatineau will review the **policy on snow clearing** this year, with a focus on, among other things, active transportation and the **winter maintenance of sidewalks and the bike paths**. Starting this year, \$110,000 will be allocated to snow clearing and de-icing the **Réseau blanc**, which is more than 3.5 km of bike paths along the Rapibus corridor and a portion of the Voyageurs pathway in the downtown.

Environmental improvements will involve the urban agriculture program, the Boucher forest, the trees and woodlots management plan, the ecocentres, the collection of bulky waste and the delivery and repair of bins on wheels.

A human resource plan also projects the addition of \$6 million over three years to hire **staff in certain under-resourced municipal departments**, including urban planning and sustainable development. This is a strategic and necessary investment to better respond to the high demand associated with our sustained demographic growth and our city's economic vitality.

More flexibility in paying taxes

For 2022, taxes will still be payable in two instalments, the first of which will be due at the end of March as a result of the budget's deferral.

This Council has asked the administration to make it possible for residents to pay their taxes in four instalments instead of two, starting in 2023. Gatineau is one of the least flexible municipalities in that regard in Quebec. Yes, there would be a cost associated with this adjustment, but it is for the benefit of our people.

Doubling our infrastructure investments

This budget goes even further in addressing residents' main concerns.

We will be investing \$271 M in 2022 to maintain and upgrade our infrastructures, twice as much as last year. The work will be spread over a few years.

This plan involves pursuing several major projects under way, including the construction of a **community complex with ice rinks** in the west end, and increased efforts to accelerate investments in **road improvements**.

We are proposing an additional \$27 M for asphaltting between 2022 and 2025. This will enable us to invest \$190 M in projected investments over four instead of five years.

We are also continuing to fine-tune how we intervene to improve efficiency, attempt to break the cycle of deterioration and optimize every dollar.

Residents at the heart of decisions

More than 300 initiatives involving participation by residents have been organized by Gatineau over the past 10 years. These consultations, workshops, surveys, exploratory undertakings and others enabled you to become better informed, to speak out and to take part in the decisions that affect you by taking part in the projects' development from the outset. Your satisfaction level regarding these activities remains high.

However, the Council wants to reiterate its intention to **improve the quality of public consultations and participation** as well as the whole area of proactive disclosure of certain documents. The reference framework for participation by residents goes back more than 15 years. It's time to revise it. Gatineau must also follow up on the conclusions of the ombudsman's report, as well as on the 2016 report on the development of relations with residents' associations and urban land use planning and development interest groups.

In addition, the use of technology and open data must play a bigger role in measuring your level of satisfaction with municipal services.

You must always be at the heart of projects, policies and by-laws because all that we do is for you, your quality of life and good living environments.

Instead of setting up a public consultation entity and asking for permission from the Government of Quebec, we can use this **opportunity to work together on reviewing all of our own residents' participation and consultation mechanisms**, and expanding the scope of those mechanisms. We can adapt the tools we have and better cast our projects to align with the perspective of resident's and democratic interests. A working group will very shortly address the issue and, yes, you will be part of it!

In fact, this budget allocates \$200,000 to top up support for neighbourhood associations, and proposes streamlining the accountability process. These measures will simplify the work of the countless volunteers, and help associations play a greater role in democracy and participation by residents.

Strategic investments for our economic revival

The downtown's revival is a priority for this Council because the pandemic has accentuated structural issues. A plan is in place, and the Municipal Council is determined to take concrete steps to promote a sense of belonging and pride among residents in the downtown by investing more than \$6 M over the next three years in:

- **short-term interventions** and transitory land use development projects along commercial roads to energize the downtown, such as the creation of a large temporary public space for cultural events;
- increased funding for **year-round entertainment**, sports events and major events; and
- additional funds for the **Culture Trail program**.

The creation of a **Bureau de coordination du centre-ville** will help provide an overview of actions and interventions by all of the partners to ensure better coordination. It will be staffed by three people.

This is the first part of the investments. The downtown needs a vision, support for its revival, love and a long-term vision if it is to become a point of reference and a natural go-to place for residents and visitors.

An investment component will ultimately be added to this plan to attract businesses that will fill the gaps in the commercial offer in the downtown. Assistance will be available to businesses, organizations and cooperatives for developing and running their operations.

Several priority projects have attracted our attention. The sites of the former **Robert-Guertin arena and the Fonderie** will be integrated into this proposal.

Gatineau's other sectors will not be left out. On the contrary. Measures will be set in place to support our business associations, which will in turn assist businesses and energize the main streets in each of those sectors. The budget includes \$500,000 to **support Gatineau's five business associations**. They will share the money equally. In so doing, the Council will entrench this initiative, which was introduced during the pandemic.

Business associations will be better supported by ID Gatineau. The pivotal organization when it comes to assisting businesses and entrepreneurship will have **a dedicated resource to guide those associations and help them with their development initiatives**. Those economic revival measures were requested by the community, and will provide the opportunity for intervention over the long term.

Structured interventions for the climate emergency

When talking about leadership and climate emergency, I can't help but say "at last!" In this budget, the Council will make history. Setting up the **Bureau de la transition écologique et de la lutte aux changements climatiques** will ensure that Gatineau transforms its approach and increases its resilience to environmental issues. Its key responsibility will be to **implement the climate plan** and to set greenhouse gas emission targets for Gatineau.

This new entity will propose directives, policies and by-laws, as well as budget and fiscal measures. It will work with the municipal administration units and serve as a partner to Gatineau stakeholders in transforming our territory and our economy.

This budget proposes an initial tranche of \$600,000, which will be used to **hire the Bureau's first three employees**.

The first phase of implementation of this plan will extend over five years. With the infusion of government funds, we estimate that this undertaking by the Municipal Council may eventually reach \$100 M.

We have earmarked \$1.4 M to correct for the flaws in the methane capture system at the former Cook landfill site. This amount may be topped up during the year, depending on the proposed solution.

The charge associated with **residual materials** management will be slightly increased, to provide \$1.1 million for requested service improvements, namely in the management of bulky waste, on-demand collection and the ecocentres.

The eight **bulky waste collections** will continue. The Council has asked the administration to work out a collection schedule better suited to your needs in light of the available data. A bulky waste collection pilot project will be introduced at different times throughout the year. Bulky waste brought to the ecocentres or the waste transfer station will continue to be accepted free of charge in 2022. Extended hours will continue. Given the popularity of the **mobile ecocentres** in the east and west ends, we will continue this initiative, and even add an extra day in the Aylmer sector.

This Council will pay the **Société de transport de l'Outaouais** (STO) an additional \$1 M for it to develop different offers with partners, such as deploying a carsharing pool and introducing financial incentives or digital apps for car pooling to substitute for single-occupant cars. The Council would like to have STO assess the possibility of deploying a system of free scooters, electric bicycles and secure bike racks in the park-and-rides.

The Council would also like the STO to develop partnerships with school service centres to get high school students accustomed to public transit by letting them use **free bus passes on evenings and weekends**.

I am proud of this first budget proposal. A \$699.5 M budget, a balanced budget.

Conclusion

It is clear that the objectives associated with the seven main orientations of the Council's program will not be achieved through this first budget alone. Each of our committees and commissions will help steer our commitments in the areas of health, housing, culture, inclusiveness, heritage and economic development. Those issues are areas of constant and significant concern to you and our city. Nonetheless, this budget is a first step towards change.

It lays the foundations for a more agile and more efficient administration, one that is closer to you. Gatineau is 20 years old, our growth is sustained, and we are faced with major opportunities. Over the next few months, we will be working on modernizing reforms and policies that will make a difference. We have to manage as a big city in order to be able to make the most of our growth and continue to improve our quality of service.

I would like to thank the entire administration team for their assistance and openness. Thanks to them, and to the contributions made by the entire Municipal Council, **we are now committed to managing better to better serve.**

Thank you!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "France Bélisle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "F" and "B".

France Bélisle
Mayor