

Community Governance Dashboard

TRISHA WRIGHT

Candidate, Paisley Ward
October 2026 Municipal Election

Municipality of Arran-Elderslie · Bruce County, Ontario

An evidence-based review drawn entirely from the municipality's own published financial statements, council documents, and 2026 budget documents. Updated June 2026.

GOVERNANCE SCORECARD — FIVE AREAS ASSESSED

Budget Accuracy & Fiscal Oversight NEEDS ATTENTION	External Audit Compliance NEEDS ATTENTION	Council Deliberation & Oversight NEEDS ATTENTION	Budget Process Transparency NEEDS ATTENTION	Regulatory Standards Adoption NEEDS ATTENTION
--	---	--	---	---

KEY FIGURES AT A GLANCE

\$5.2M Total transportation overrun, 2020–2024	5 straight Consecutive years over approved budget	58% Worst single-year overrun (2022 transportation)	2 years Past mandatory PS 3280 accounting deadline
--	---	---	--

TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT — APPROVED BUDGET VS. ACTUAL SPENDING (2020–2024)

AUDIT OPINIONS — 2022 TO 2024



What this means: Three consecutive years without a clean audit opinion. A qualified opinion means the auditor found a departure from required accounting standards. Clean (unqualified) is the expected baseline.

The cause: PS 3280 (Asset Retirement Obligations) became mandatory January 1, 2023. Arran-Elderslie had not adopted it as of December 31, 2024 — two full years past the deadline.

Source: Consolidated Statement of Operations, page 9, each year's audited financial statements (verified from primary source PDFs).

WHAT'S HIDDEN WITHOUT PS 3280

Without this standard, residents cannot see the estimated future cost of retiring public infrastructure — roads, water systems, waste facilities. These are

real financial obligations that belong on the balance sheet.

\$5,221,796

Total amount by which transportation spending exceeded the approved budget over five consecutive years (2020–2024), verified directly from each year's audited Consolidated Statement of Operations. Largest single-year overrun: 2022 — \$3,644,977 actual vs. \$2,311,509 approved (58% over budget).

WHY DOES A MUNICIPALITY WITH \$21M IN RESERVES STILL OVERSPEND ITS BUDGET?

THE SHORT ANSWER

Arran-Elderslie ended 2024 with **\$21,101,361 in reserve funds** and a total accumulated surplus of **\$71,208,708**. Yet transportation spending exceeded council's approved budget by over \$1 million every year for five years. These are not contradictory — but the gap between them is a governance concern.

What Reserves Actually Are

- Money earmarked for specific future capital projects — a new bridge, fire hall, equipment, infrastructure replacement
- Typically cannot be redirected to cover day-to-day operating costs without a formal council resolution
- Examples from 2025 budget: working capital reserve, bridge reserve, fire reserve, water reserve, equipment reserve
- Healthy reserves are a sign of prudent long-term planning
- Arran-Elderslie generates a consistent annual surplus (\$3.7M–\$4.0M per year in 2023–2024), most of which flows into these reserve funds

What the Overspending Means

- Transportation overruns (\$875K–\$1.33M per year) are *operating* expenses — road maintenance, gravel, salt, staff hours, equipment fuel
- These must come from the operating budget council approved, not from capital reserves
- The governance issue: council approved one budget and actual spending was materially different — every single year for five years
- No public record of mid-year budget amendments being brought back to council for approval of the extra spending
- Abundant reserves do not justify exceeding a democratically approved operating budget without council authorization

THE GOVERNANCE QUESTION THIS RAISES

When reserves are healthy and the municipality generates an annual surplus, it can be tempting to treat the operating budget as a guideline rather than an authorization. But under Ontario's *Municipal Act, 2001*, council approves the budget and staff is accountable for operating within it. The pattern of overruns — without documented council approval of additional spending — represents a gap between what residents authorized and what was spent. That gap deserves explanation, oversight, and a clear plan to prevent it repeating.

Bruce Road 3 runs through the heart of Paisley as a heavily-trafficked county road connecting cottage country and tourist destinations. Residents and council have long raised concerns about vehicles not slowing to safe speeds through the downtown, putting pedestrians — residents and visitors alike — at risk. Here is the documented record:

AUGUST 9, 2021 — Council Resolution
Arran-Elderslie council passed a formal resolution directing Mayor Hammell to write to Bruce County requesting traffic-calming measures. Council cited receiving speeding complaints "on a regular basis" and specifically requested **crosswalks and traffic lights** as solutions.

SEPTEMBER 13, 2021 — Formal Letter to Bruce County
Mayor Hammell wrote to Bruce County CAO Sandra Datars Bere. The letter named **Bruce Road 3 through Paisley** and Bruce Road 10 through Chesley and Tara as roads of specific concern. It requested: (1) crosswalks and traffic lights; (2) Community Safety Zone designation under Highway Traffic Act s.214.1(1), which enables photo-radar enforcement; (3) formation of a Speed Mitigation Taskforce. A copy was sent to OPP. [View letter →](#)

WHY BRUCE COUNTY CONTROLS THIS
Bruce Road 3 is a **county road**, not a municipal road. The municipality can request action but cannot unilaterally install lights or redesignate the road. Jurisdiction sits with Bruce County. The municipality's leverage is sustained formal advocacy.

2022–2025 — No Documented Resolution Found
A review of publicly available council minutes and the municipality's online document library found no evidence of: a Bruce County response, a Community Safety Zone by-law for Paisley, formation of a Speed Mitigation Taskforce, or installation of crosswalk lights on Bruce Road 3. The safety request from 2021 does not appear to have generated documented follow-up in the public record.

WHAT I WILL DO

As Paisley Ward Councillor, I will:

- 1. Revive the formal request** — table a motion that council formally re-send its request to Bruce County, referencing the unanswered 2021 letter and the elapsed time.
- 2. Escalate to MPP** — coordinate with MPP Rick Byers to raise the Community Safety Zone designation at the provincial level, which enables automated speed enforcement.
- 3. Request a safety audit** — propose a formal pedestrian safety audit of Bruce Road 3 through Paisley, with findings reported to council within one year.
- 4. Report publicly** — ensure residents receive regular updates on the status of the request, not silence.

THE BIGGER PATTERN

The Paisley safety request is a concrete example of the governance gap this campaign addresses: a request was raised, council acted on it in 2021, and the public record shows no documented follow-through. **Good governance means tracking what you asked for and reporting back to residents.**

❑ **FIRST USE OF STRONG MAYOR POWERS — VERIFIED**

On **May 1, 2025**, Mayor Steve Hammell was granted Strong Mayor powers under Bill 3 (*Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, 2022*), along with 168 other Ontario mayors. This is confirmed on the municipality's own [Mayoral Decisions page](#). Under these powers, **the Mayor — not the CAO, not council — proposes the budget**. Council then needs a 2/3 supermajority (6 of 7 members) to override any line item. The 2026 budget was adopted on **December 24, 2025 (Christmas Eve)** — 42 days after the November 12 public meeting.

What the CAO does vs. what the Mayor does: The CAO (Sylvia Kirkwood) and finance staff prepare the budget documents and run the numbers. But under Strong Mayor rules, the CAO now answers directly to the Mayor, not to council as a whole. The Mayor sets the direction; the CAO executes. The legal authority to adopt this budget was Mayor Hammell's.

Transparency gap — also verified: Ontario law requires mayors to publicly post all formal decisions made under Strong Mayor powers. The municipality's Mayoral Decisions page lists three sections (By-Laws, Decisions, Direction to Staff) — all three say "**coming soon.**" If Mayor Hammell exercised these powers to adopt the 2026 budget, that decision should be publicly documented. It is not.

⚠ **MAYOR HAMMELL'S OWN WORDS — APRIL 2025 VS. NOVEMBER 2025**

On **April 14, 2025**, Mayor Hammell and the full council passed a formal motion opposing Strong Mayor Powers. His public statement:

"Strong Mayor Powers undermine the collaborative nature of municipal councils and the essential role of all elected officials in local decision-making."
— Mayor Steve Hammell, April 2025 (Saugeen Times, April 15, 2025)

Seven months later — on **November 24, 2025** — Mayor Hammell formally invoked those same powers to submit the 2026 budget without a council vote, with a Christmas Eve deadline that gave council only one meeting (December 8) within the 30-day window to respond. The budget was adopted by default, not by vote.

The question every resident deserves answered: What changed between April and November 2025?

WORKING CAPITAL RESERVE — DOWN 52%

2022	\$2,849,070
2024	\$3,077,564
2025 est.	\$1,872,742
2026 est.	\$1,479,535

Being drawn down primarily for the Paisley Fire Hall & Public Works capital project. Down \$1.6M (-52%) from 2024 to 2026.

EMPLOYMENT MATTERS RESERVE — \$364K UNEXPLAINED

2022 audited	\$40,021
--------------	----------

Year	Cash operating actual	Audited (incl. amortization)
2023	\$2,638,765	\$3,542,434
2024	\$2,906,004	\$3,846,541
2026 budget	\$3,382,026	—

The 2026 cash budget is 16% above 2024 cash actuals — a more defensible position than headline comparisons suggest. The largest single change: **bridges budget cut 35%** (\$532K → \$348K) after a heavy bridge year in 2025. The 5-year overrun story in audited statements remains real and valid — amortization is a genuine economic cost representing infrastructure wearing out.

2024 est.	\$86,707
2026 est.	\$416,779

A **\$364,000 single-year injection** is planned for 2026 — nearly 5x the reserve's 2024 balance. This account covers anticipated employment costs: severance, HR disputes, labour relations. **No public explanation appears in the budget documents.**

What the council minutes reveal: at the **same November 24 meeting** where the budget was submitted under Strong Mayor powers, (1) Mayor Hammell reported he would be attending *union negotiations*, and (2) council went into a closed session labelled "*Building Reserve Update*" but classified under the **personal matters exemption — about an identifiable individual, including municipal employees**. That closed session was received for information only — no action taken. No connection is confirmed, but no public explanation has ever been provided for the \$364,000 injection either.

ALSO MISSING FROM 2026 CAPITAL BUDGET: PAISLEY PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

The 2026 capital budget includes \$90,000 for a **water main on Bruce Road 3 in Paisley** (the same road where residents have raised pedestrian safety concerns since 2021). The road will be dug up. But there is zero reference to crosswalks, traffic lights, or Community Safety Zone infrastructure — despite the unanswered 2021 request. A council-led petition to Bruce County could have accompanied this capital work. That opportunity appears to have been missed.

MY COMMITMENTS IF ELECTED

- Quarterly variance reports** — Move that council receive budget vs. actual comparisons each quarter so overruns are caught early, not discovered at year-end audit.
- PS 3280 adoption plan** — Request a concrete implementation timeline from the Treasurer with a firm date. Three consecutive qualified opinions is not an acceptable standard.
- Annual council budget workshop** — Propose a spring session where elected members set fiscal priorities before staff begins drafting. Council should lead; staff should execute.
- Paisley safety escalation** — Revive the unanswered 2021 request to Bruce County; formally pursue Community Safety Zone designation and a pedestrian safety audit of Bruce Road 3.
- Public progress reporting** — Commit to providing residents a written update at each council meeting on outstanding requests to the county and province — so advocacy is visible and accountable.

PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENTS — ALL LINKS VERIFIED

[2024 Audited Financial Statements](#)

[2023 Audited Financial Statements](#)

arran-elderslie.ca/media/a2tfra02/20241231-final-financial-statements.pdf

MNP LLP qualified opinion. Transport actual: \$3,846,541 vs. budget \$2,812,587. Reserves: \$21,101,361.

arran-elderslie.ca/media/bxvnm5y/20231231-final-financial-statements.pdf

MNP LLP qualified opinion. Transport actual: \$3,542,434 vs. budget \$2,666,648. Reserves: \$20,892,587.

2022 Audited Financial Statements

arran-elderslie.ca/media/i40lub4u/20221231-financial-statements...

BDO Canada qualified opinion. Transport actual: \$3,644,977 vs. budget \$2,311,509 (58% over).

2021 Audited Financial Statements

arran-elderslie.ca/media/ufef5jlg/fsd04-20211231-full-financial-statements...

Transport actual: \$3,227,222 vs. budget \$2,266,826 (42% over).

2020 Audited Financial Statements

arran-elderslie.ca/media/cbgjivar/20201231-final-full-financial-statements...

Transport actual: \$3,285,678 vs. budget \$2,267,486 (45% over).

2025 Budget — Public Meeting Presentation

arran-elderslie.ca/media/vc0h1v4c/2025-budget-public-meeting-presentation.pdf

Council-approved 2025 budget overview. Capital reserve categories identified.

By-Law 03-2025 — Adoption of 2025 Budget

arran-elderslie.ca/media/hnfcvqx2/bylaw032025adoptthe2025budget.pdf

Formal by-law enacting the 2025 municipal budget.

Procedural By-law 76-2021

arran-elderslie.ca/media/favptv1j/full-76-2021-procedure-bylaw.pdf

Council's own rules of order. Sections 12 and 16.7 govern delegation rights and public participation.

Paisley Speeding Letter to Bruce County (Sept 13, 2021)

pub-arranelderslie.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=907

Mayor Hammell's formal letter to Bruce County CAO re: Bruce Road 3 speeding, requesting crosswalks, traffic lights, and Community Safety Zone designation.

Council Meeting — September 13, 2021 (speeding resolution)

pub-arranelderslie.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=c1c05e45...

Minutes confirming council's direction to write to Bruce County regarding speeding through Arran-Elderslie communities.

Staff Report SRFUN.24.22 — 2025 Budget Draft 3

arran-elderslie.ca/media/bjgh50vg/srfun24222025budgetdraft3.pdf

Staff-initiated budget report. Used to illustrate council vs. staff budget direction roles.

Ontario Municipal Act, 2001

ontario.ca/laws/statute/01m25

Governs council roles (s.224), CAO responsibilities (s. 229), and budget adoption (s.290). Part VI.1 covers Strong Mayor powers.

Mayoral Decisions Page (Strong Mayor)

arran-elderslie.ca/government/council-and-administration/mayoral-decisions/

Confirms Strong Mayor powers granted May 1, 2025. Required public record of decisions listed "coming soon" — nothing posted.

2026 Operating Budget Draft 2 — Summary

arran-elderslie.ca/media/okzlepszf/2026-operating-budget-draft-2-summary-by-department.pdf

All department operating budgets. Transportation total 2026: \$3,382,026. Verified line by line.

2026 Reserves Draft 2

arran-elderslie.ca/media/eqtayblv/2026-reserves-draft-2.pdf

Working capital reserve drops from \$3,077,564 (2024) to \$1,479,535 (2026). Employment Matters reserve: \$364,000 injection planned.

2026 Capital Budget Draft 2

arran-elderslie.ca/media/ccwnzwvy/2026-capital-budget-draft-2.pdf

Total capital: \$4,820,825. Includes \$90K water main on Bruce Road 3 — but no pedestrian safety infrastructure.

2026 Budget Public Meeting Presentation

arran-elderslie.ca/media/yxhosnoj/2026-budget-public-meeting-presentation.pdf

November 12, 2025 public meeting. 4.95% tax increase + new \$103/yr stormwater fee. Adopted Dec 24, 2025.

Trisha Wright — Paisley Ward

Governance expertise. Practical solutions. Your community, well represented.

trisha@clearpointmediation.com

October 2026 Municipal Election

All figures verified directly from primary source documents published by the Municipality of Arran-Elderslie and Bruce County. 2020–2024 financial figures sourced from the Consolidated Statement of Operations (page 9) of each year’s audited financial statements. 2026 budget figures sourced from 2026 Operating Budget Draft 2, 2026 Reserves Draft 2, and 2026 Capital Budget Draft 2 (all published by the municipality). Strong Mayor powers confirmed from the Mayoral Decisions page (arran-elderslie.ca). Operating budget actuals are cash-based; audited statement figures include amortization of tangible capital assets (~\$940K/year for transportation). Speeding letter sourced from the September 13, 2021 council meeting agenda (Document ID 907). This document was prepared by Trisha Wright, candidate for Paisley Ward Councillor, Municipality of Arran-Elderslie, for the October 2026 municipal election.