August 23, 2026

City of Cambridge
Office of the Mayor and Council
50 Dickson St.
Cambridge, ON N1R 5W8

Attention: Ana Djukic, Chief of Staff

Subject: Request for Explanation and Financial Reconciliation of Stormwater Billing – 527 River Road

Dear Mayor and Members of Council,

I am writing regarding the City's decision to remove stormwater costs from the general property-tax levy and establish a separate stormwater charge.

Irene Lanno, the registered owner of **527 River Road**, has authorized me to communicate with the City and to discuss all matters pertaining to this property, including but not limited to the City's stormwater billing system.

I am therefore requesting a clear and comprehensive response to the concerns outlined below.

1. Why was stormwater removed from the general property-tax system?

I understand the City's position that separately billing stormwater makes the cost more visible to property owners and that the charge is more directly associated with individual properties.

However, greater visibility does not, by itself, establish that the charge is more equitable, appropriate, or necessary.

A separate invoice can certainly make a cost more transparent, but transparency does not demonstrate:

- that the charge is fair;
- that property size is the appropriate basis for allocating the cost;
- that the cost is being allocated equitably among property owners;
- that the amount being charged is reasonable; or
- that stormwater should be treated differently from other essential municipal services funded through general taxation.

My question is therefore not simply how the stormwater charge is calculated. I am asking **why Council determined that stormwater should be removed from the general property-tax system in the first place**.

If stormwater is considered an essential municipal service that benefits the community as a whole, I would ask Council to explain why it is being treated differently from other essential municipal services that continue to be funded through general taxation.

Conversely, if the City's position is that stormwater should be charged separately because there is a specific and measurable cost or benefit attributable to individual properties, I would ask the City to explain the basis for that conclusion.

2. Why is property size an appropriate and equitable basis for allocating the cost?

I would also like the City to explain why property size has been determined to be an appropriate measure for allocating stormwater costs.

What evidence or analysis did Council rely upon in determining that property size provides a fair representation of the stormwater costs attributable to a property?

For example, did Council consider other factors such as the property's actual contribution to stormwater runoff, impervious surface area, location, existing municipal infrastructure, or the extent to which a particular property utilizes or benefits from the City's stormwater system?

If property size was selected as the appropriate methodology, I would appreciate an explanation of **why that methodology is considered more equitable than continuing to fund stormwater through the general property-tax system**.

3. Was the change genuinely revenue-neutral?

I am particularly concerned about the financial impact of this change on property owners.

Historically, annual increases in my property taxes have generally been in the range of approximately **5% to 6%**.

For 2026, however, once the separate stormwater charge is included, my total financial obligation for property tax and stormwater is approximately **10.3% higher than the amount payable in 2025**.

I recognize that the City may characterize the stormwater charge as a separate fee rather than a property-tax increase. However, from the taxpayer's perspective, the relevant issue is the **total amount being charged for municipal services**, regardless of whether that amount appears on one bill or two.

If the City's position is that this change was simply a restructuring of how stormwater costs are collected, rather than an increase in the overall cost to taxpayers, I am requesting a detailed year-over-year financial reconciliation.

Specifically, please provide:

1. The total amount of stormwater costs that was included in the general property-tax levy before the change;
2. The amount by which the general property-tax levy was reduced when stormwater was removed;
3. The total amount of stormwater revenue the City expected to collect through the new separate billing system;
4. The total amount actually being collected through the separate stormwater charges;
5. The methodology used to determine the individual property charges;
6. The change in the total amount being paid by taxpayers for stormwater compared with the previous system; and
7. Confirmation as to whether Council intended this change to be **revenue-neutral for taxpayers as a whole**.

If the City's position is that the change was revenue-neutral, I would ask that the City provide the figures demonstrating that this is the case.

4. The broader issue of municipal services

I also believe Council should consider the broader principle being applied here.

My property does not have direct access or connection to a number of municipal services and infrastructure that are available elsewhere in the community, including:

- municipal stormwater infrastructure;
- municipal sanitary sewer;
- municipal water;
- street lighting;
- sidewalks; and
- curbs.

I fully understand that municipal taxation is not intended to operate as a strict "user-pay" system. I accept that property owners contribute toward municipal services and infrastructure that may not directly benefit their individual property.

That is precisely why I question the City's decision to remove stormwater from the general property-tax levy and establish a separate charge based on property characteristics.

If stormwater is an essential community service that benefits the community as a whole, why is it being treated differently from other municipal services and infrastructure that continue to be funded through general taxation?

Conversely, if the City has determined that stormwater should be charged directly to individual properties because of the specific benefit received or cost attributable to those properties, I would ask why that principle is not applied consistently to other municipal infrastructure and services.

I believe Council should clearly explain the policy rationale for treating stormwater differently and demonstrate why the resulting method of cost allocation is fair and equitable to all property owners.

5. Request for a substantive response

I am not asking simply for an explanation of how to read my stormwater bill. I am asking Council to explain the **policy and financial rationale behind the decision itself**.

In particular, I am requesting clear answers to the following fundamental questions:

1. **Why did Council decide that stormwater should be removed from the general property-tax levy?**
2. **Why was a separate property-based charge considered more appropriate and equitable than general taxation?**
3. **What evidence supports property size as an appropriate basis for allocating stormwater costs?**
4. **Was the removal of stormwater from property taxes and its replacement with a separate charge genuinely revenue-neutral?**
5. **If it was revenue-neutral, can the City provide the financial reconciliation demonstrating this?**
6. **If it was not revenue-neutral, what specifically accounts for the additional cost being borne by property owners?**
7. **What was the intended financial impact of this change on individual taxpayers?**

I believe taxpayers are entitled to more than an explanation that the new system is "more transparent." Transparency is valuable, but it does not, on its own, establish fairness, equity, appropriateness, or financial neutrality.

I am therefore requesting that Council provide a detailed response to each of the questions above, supported where applicable by the financial figures, methodology, and policy rationale relied upon when this change was approved.

My objective is to understand precisely why this change was made, how the charges were established, and whether the financial impact on property owners is consistent with the City's stated purpose for introducing the separate stormwater billing system.

I look forward to receiving a substantive response addressing each of these concerns individually.

Yours truly,