



LAWSON

Ottawa deserves better.

ALEX LAWSON FOR MAYOR

Report Red Tape.

If it's slowing you down, City Hall should hear about it.

POLICY PAPER

OCTOBER 2026

01 / OVERVIEW

Nowhere to send the story.

Every business owner in Ottawa has a red tape story. The permit that took four months. The form that asks for the same thing three times. The rule nobody at City Hall can explain.

Right now, there is nowhere to send that story.

In September, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business graded 66 Canadian municipalities on how they treat small business. Ottawa got a C-minus. Fifth place, one spot behind Toronto.

CFIB checked whether each city gives businesses a dedicated place to report red tape. Two do: Toronto and Red Deer. Red Deer is ranked first in the country. Ottawa scored zero.

OTTAWA'S GRADE

C-minus

From CFIB's 2026 municipal report card

CFIB, September 2026.

RED TAPE CHANNELS

2 of 66

Municipalities with a dedicated place to report red tape

CFIB, September 2026.

OTTAWA'S REGULATORY SCORE

5.0 / 10

Zero for a red tape reporting channel

CFIB, September 2026.

ONE PORTAL, ONE POINT

+1.0

Lift to Ottawa's overall score, by CFIB's own formula

CFIB, September 2026.

02 / CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

It's a start.

In June 2026, City Council modernized Ottawa's business licensing rules. It consolidated licence categories and removed duplicate steps. Festival vendors can now get a low-cost one-day licence. All-night dance events no longer need a separate licence and fee for every event. An online one-stop shop for licences is promised by the end of the year.

That is real work, and Alex Lawson gives Council credit for it.

It is also a start. Licensing is one corner of City Hall. And a business that hits a wall on signs, patios, inspections or permits still has nowhere to report it.

03 / THE PLAN

Nine commitments.

COMMITMENT 01

The Report Red Tape portal.

An online form on ottawa.ca and a 311 option, in English and French. It takes two minutes to report what happened, which department, and what it cost in time or money.

COMMITMENT 02

Every report acknowledged, every issue answered.

Each report is acknowledged within five business days, with a named staff contact. Reports about the same rule are grouped, so staff answer the issue once instead of the same complaint 40 times. The public tracker shows how long every issue has been open, and the quarterly report to Council names any issue still open after 90 days.

COMMITMENT 03

A public tracker.

Every report, its status and its outcome are posted online, with business names removed. If 40 restaurants hit the same patio rule, everyone can see it.

COMMITMENT 04

A quarterly red tape report to Council.

The report lists the top ten complaints and what changed. Rules that need a vote go to Council with a recommendation.

COMMITMENT 05

A first-year audit.

The audit starts with licensing, sign permits, patios and A-frame signs, then moves to whatever the portal flags.

COMMITMENT 06

One rule out for every rule in.

No new business requirement goes ahead without a cost estimate and a review date.

COMMITMENT 07

Fewer permits to open.

Cut the number of permits it takes to open a restaurant, a shop or a home-based contracting business, measured against CFIB's three test cases. The count is published before and after.

COMMITMENT 08

Clear business pages.

Tax rates, licensing steps and fees each get one plain page. Nobody should have to read a by-law to find out what they owe.

COMMITMENT 09

Value-for-money audits.

Every year, Alex will ask the Auditor General to audit two City departments for value for money and report before the budget. Departments that can't show results get reviewed first.

04 / HOW IT MOVES THE GRADE

Toronto built one. Red Deer built one.

CFIB weighs a dedicated red tape channel at a quarter of its regulatory score. By CFIB's own formula, that one change is worth about a full point on Ottawa's overall score: from 6.51 to about 7.5. That would put Ottawa ahead of Red Deer, the current leader at 7.33.

Every employer deciding between Ottawa and another city looks at how easy it is to get things done. Ottawa lost 30,500 jobs between February 2025 and February 2026. This is how Ottawa competes.

A C-minus isn't good enough for a G7 capital that lost 30,500 jobs in a year.

05 / STRAIGHT TALK ON THE MONEY

No new hires. No new department.

The portal runs on systems the City already has: ottawa.ca and 311. It is staffed by existing City employees in business services and economic development. The Auditor General's office already exists.

The real cost is the one Ottawa pays now: every permit delay and duplicate form that sends a business to another city.

06 / PART OF THE PLAN

Ottawa can build one too.

Report Red Tape works alongside Jobs and Growth (one City contact for every employer, with published decision timelines), Open During Construction, the Small Business Tax Cut, and Your Money in Plain Sight (every City contract online).

Toronto built one. Red Deer built one. Ottawa can build one too.



Alex Lawson. Builder, not politician.

07 / SOURCES & VERIFICATION

Every figure here is sourced.

CFIB 2026 MUNICIPAL REPORT CARD

Released September 15, 2026; 66 municipalities graded. Ottawa fifth at 6.51 (C-minus), Toronto fourth at 6.57, Red Deer first at 7.33. Ottawa's regulatory score is 5.0. Only Toronto and Red Deer have a dedicated red tape feedback portal (scored 10 with one, 0 without).

<https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/en/research-economic-analysis/open-for-business-canadas-2026-municipal-report-card>

HOW THE GRADE MOVES

In CFIB's method the red tape portal is 25 per cent of the regulatory category, and the regulatory category is 40 per cent of the overall score. A portal adds 2.5 points to Ottawa's regulatory score (5.0 to 7.5), which adds 1.0 to the overall score (6.51 to about 7.5), all else equal.

https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/hubfs/research/reports/2026/09-2026_CFIB_Municipal_Report.pdf

COUNCIL LICENSING CHANGES

Modernized business licensing by-law approved by Council June 24, 2026: consolidated categories, fewer duplicate steps, a low-cost one-day festival vendor licence, a streamlined authorization for all-night dance events without a separate licence and fee, and an online one-stop shop expected by the end of 2026.

<https://www.ottawafestivals.ca/post/council-approves-modernized-licensing-by-law>

TORONTO AND RED DEER

Toronto launched a pilot red tape hotline for business owners in 2025. Red Deer runs an online Report Red Tape form at reddeer.ca.

<https://www.toronto.ca/news/city-of-toronto-hotline-helps-local-business-owners-cut-through-red-tape/>

OTTAWA JOB LOSSES

Employment in the Ontario part of Ottawa-Gatineau fell by about 30,000 from the first quarter of 2025 to the first quarter of 2026. Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey, as reported in Ontario's quarterly employment report.

<https://www.ontario.ca/document/ontario-employment-reports/january-march-2026>

Authorized by the official agent of the Alex Lawson campaign.