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From his teacher's perspective

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Single residents in Outaouais top Quebec's poverty threshold



Tashi Farmilo
LJ Reporter

A person living alone in Gatineau needs to bring home more than \$43,000 after tax every year just to escape poverty. That is the finding of a major new study released April 30 by the Institute for Socioeconomic Research and Information (IRIS), and it makes Gatineau the most expensive city in Quebec for a single person, more costly even than Montreal.

That number is not a comfortable salary. It is the bare minimum needed to afford decent food, adequate housing, a way to get around, clothing, basic health care, and a modest cushion for emergencies. It leaves little room for anything else. Fall below it, and by the institute's measure, a person is living in poverty.

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A new IRIS report finds that a single person in Gatineau needs to earn more than \$43,000 after tax to escape poverty, the highest threshold of any city in Quebec, as rents surge and the minimum wage falls further behind the cost of living. (TF)

PHOTO: TASHI FARMILO

Quebec women still carry more of the load at home and have smaller paycheques



Tashi Farmilo
LJ Reporter

A new provincial report confirms what many Quebec women already know: even though things are slowly getting better, in Quebec couples, women are still more likely than men to earn less, and the gap is widest for those who can least afford it.

The Conseil du statut de la femme, a government body that advises on women's issues, released the findings in April. The picture it paints is one of uneven progress.

More than half of Quebec couples now share

earnings equally, which is an improvement from over a generation ago. But a third of couples still follow the old pattern, where the man earns most of the money, and in one of five couples, the woman has no employment income at all.

Age makes a significant difference. Women in their late thirties through their mid-fifties are the most likely to be on roughly equal financial footing with their partners. But for women 65 and older, the traditional picture dominates: six in ten of those couples still have the man as the primary or sole earner. Many of these women spent years working less, or not at all, often to raise children or

support a partner's career, and are now living with the financial consequences of those choices.

Having children does not automatically push a couple toward the traditional model, but having three or more does.

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Single residents in Outaouais top Quebec's poverty threshold

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Most workers in the Outaouais are falling well short of it.

Someone working full time at Quebec's minimum wage, which rises to \$16.60 an hour on May 1, takes home roughly \$27,600 a year after tax. That is about \$15,000 less than what IRIS says a single person in Gatineau needs to get by. Closing that gap would require nearly doubling the minimum wage. IRIS calculates that a single person needs to earn around \$30 an hour, working full time, just to reach the poverty exit line.

Housing is the single biggest reason Gatineau ranks so high. Rent for a single person now costs an estimated \$20,745 per year, the steepest of any city in the study, edging out even Montreal. Across all seven

cities examined, rents rose an average of 10.9% over the past year, nearly double the 5.9% increase the Administrative Housing Tribunal recommended. This is the third year in a row that actual increases have far outpaced official guidance.

For families, the situation is harder still. A single parent raising one preschool-age child in Gatineau needs just under \$56,000 a year to stay out of poverty. A two-parent household with two young children needs \$84,565. Those are after-tax figures, meaning the gross income required is considerably higher.

One of the more striking findings in this year's report involves Montreal and Sept-Îles, two cities that have arrived, for the first time, at nearly the same living income for a family of four: \$88,812 in Montreal and \$88,266 in Sept-Îles. They get there by op-

posite paths. Montreal's crushing housing costs add nearly \$10,000 a year compared to Sept-Îles. Sept-Îles, with no meaningful public transit, requires two cars per household, adding nearly \$9,000 in transportation costs. The result is a near-tie between a dense urban centre and a remote northern city, for entirely different reasons.

At the affordable end of the scale, Trois-Rivières remains the least expensive city in the study, with a living income of just over \$33,000 for a single person, largely because of its low-cost transit network. Even so, rents there climbed 15% in the past year alone.

This year's report also accounts for rising fuel prices tied to the war in Iran, applying a 15% surcharge to fuel costs based on the pattern seen after the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022, when pump prices

jumped more than 30% before slowly coming back down.

The hardest picture in the report is reserved for those with the least. A senior living on Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement has a disposable income of about \$25,400, just below the federal poverty threshold, and that threshold does not even include uninsured medical costs that older people disproportionately face. Someone on basic social assistance receives \$12,377, roughly 30 cents for every dollar the living income requires.

The report does not argue that these are obscure policy problems. It argues that they are the daily reality of a very large number of people, many of them working, many of them doing everything that is conventionally expected, and still not making it to the other side of the poverty line.

Quebec women still carry more of the load at home and have smaller paycheques

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The report also finds that childless couples are more likely to be unequal than those with one or two children, partly because that group includes many older couples whose children have grown up and left home.

The sharpest finding is about money itself. The less a household earns overall, the more likely it is that the woman contributes little or nothing to that income. In the lowest-income households, it is far more common for the woman to have no earnings than for the man. The report does not say why, but the reasons are not hard to imagine: precarious work, lack of affordable childcare, and the persistent expectation that women absorb caregiving responsibilities when a family cannot afford otherwise.

Even among couples where both partners work, women across Quebec still earn



Women in Quebec are still earning less than their partners and absorbing more of the unpaid burden at home, and a new provincial report shows the problem is worst for older women and those in low-income households. (TF)

PHOTO: TASHI FARMILO

about 90 cents for every dollar men earn, a figure that got slightly worse in 2025 compared to the year before.

For people in the Outaouais, there is some reason for cautious optimism. The area has the highest average hourly wages in Quebec, which analysts attribute to the large number of people working in the federal public service there. Federal employment comes with relatively strong pay equity protections, which may give women in the Outaouais a somewhat better foundation than their counterparts elsewhere in the province. Even so, the report does not break down its findings by area, so it is impossible to say how Outaouais couples compare specifically.

What the report makes clear overall is that financial inequality within couples is not a relic. It is present; it is common; and it falls almost entirely on women.

Quebec pulls first responders from lower-priority calls, sparking rural pushback



Tashi Farmilo
LJJ Reporter

The Municipality of La Pêche is demanding that provincial health authorities cancel a policy change it says leaves rural residents more vulnerable in medical emergencies, after Santé Québec removed local first responders from an entire category of calls last fall.

Since September 2025, first responders

across Quebec have been barred from responding to calls classified as Priority Level 3, a category covering situations where a phone dispatcher has judged the patient to be in no immediate mortal danger. Examples include dizziness, shortness of breath, or general feelings of illness. Only an ambulance is now dispatched for such calls, with the directive applied province-wide through agreements concluded with all Quebec municipalities.

Santé Québec has defended the change as a matter of resource management. Fire departments had signalled a need to concentrate on their primary mandate of fire risk coverage, and the agency concluded that first responder efforts should be reserved for Priority 0 and 1 calls, where seconds count and the stakes are unambiguous.

La Pêche's municipal council is unconvinced. It adopted a formal resolution in late April calling on Santé Québec to re-

verse course, sending it to the CISSS de l'Outaouais as well as to provincial ministers and members of the National Assembly, with the aim of building a coalition among rural Outaouais municipalities facing the same situation.

The municipality's central argument is that a telephone assessment made from a dispatch centre is a poor substitute for eyes on the ground.

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Eight Outaouais organizations receive funding to support kids' free play initiatives



Sophie Demers
LJJ Reporter

The Outaouais Philanthropy Foundation (FPO), a community foundation with the mission to build enthusiastic and lasting communities in the region, has selected eight local organizations to receive funding to support free play through their Free Play Fund. This funding is available thanks to a \$473,000 grant from Community Foundations of Canada (CFC).

The fund supports local initiatives that will encourage kids up to age twelve to move, be creative, and learn through free play. The fund aims to help communities remove barriers to play so kids can connect with their environment, their peers, and learn about themselves all while supporting development and the creation of social bonds.

The eight recipient organizations include: Le Centre d'animation familiale de l'Outaouais Inc. in Gatineau, CPE La Bottine de Maniwaki Inc. in Vallée-de-la-Gatineau, La Maison de l'Amitié de Hull, Municipality of Campbell's Bay, Municipality of Chelsea, Carrefour familial Papineau, Les Partenaires



du Secteur Aylmer, and the Chelsea Cooperative Nursery School.

"The FPO believes that balanced representation of the Outaouais region

is essential to ensuring a strong and inclusive regional impact. The selected organizations reflect this," said FPO President, Rock Poulin.

A total of 32 initiatives were submitted during the call for projects. This first round of funding represents phase 1 of the grant.

Quebec pulls first responders from lower-priority calls, sparking rural pushback

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A patient's condition can deteriorate sharply between the moment a call comes in and the moment paramedics walk through the door, and in rural areas where ambulance coverage is thin, that gap can be dangerously long. In parts of La Pêche's territory, there is no ambulance permanently stationed nearby, meaning some calls are answered by paramedics driving in from

Gatineau. The municipality's fire and civil security department has operated a first responder program since 2021, fielding roughly 140 Priority 3 calls per year at a total annual cost of around \$20,000. Some of those calls, the municipality says, ended with lives saved.

The dispute lands in the middle of a long-running crisis in Quebec's pre-hospital care system. A May 2025 report from

the province's auditor general found that roughly half of Quebec's population lives in communities with no first responder coverage whatsoever, and that nearly half of high-priority calls in those municipalities saw ambulances take more than ten minutes to arrive. The auditor described the government's plan as a failure, particularly in rural areas. The stakes of slow response times are not abstract: medical evidence

shows that a cardiac arrest victim's odds of survival drop by seven to ten per cent with every passing minute.

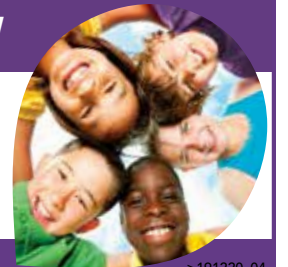
La Pêche says the Priority 3 policy was imposed without meaningful consultation with the communities it affects most. The municipality has made clear it will keep pressing for a formal exemption at the provincial level, and it is hoping it will not have to do so alone.

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Dealing with Floods (1) - Long Term Solutions



Ian Barrett

Again this spring, Outaouais has faced severe floods, the fourth “flood of the century” since 2017. This puts financial strain on those living in flood zones, but also on the city at large. The status quo of providing sandbags and emergency relief just isn’t sustainable. A single season of such emergency relief costs the city millions of dollars, and the owners of flooded homes have no hope of getting insurance.

The good news is that, to very little fanfare, the city has been making some progress in terms of long term solutions, at least in certain parts of the region like Pointe-Gatineau. Houses on some streets there have been torn down, with the land

converted into green space, which acts like a sponge to soak up at least some water when rivers overflow. An article in *Le Droit* from over two years ago spoke of almost 500 residences between Pont Noir and Chemin du Fer-à-Cheval that could be expropriated, but little has been reported since then. Expropriations are by far the easiest use of public funds to justify, much cheaper than installing flood barriers and levees around flood prone areas. Beyond the initial construction costs these would also require expensive ongoing maintenance.

In terms of the expropriations thus far, little detailed information has surfaced. Whether this is simply because of insufficient public and media interest or to protect the privacy of those being expropriated is hard to say.

Even in the preliminary plans discussed years ago, there was relatively little mention of Aylmer, aside from high-level discussions of levees and pumps. Yet here we are with a fourth year in the last decade of sandbags and flooded basements for homes along the river. With “floods of the century” becoming more “floods of every year or two”, something has to give. The worst outcome would be continuing to fund these bandaid solutions for years to come, only to finally realize that expropriations are the only way. It’s better to invest larger sums for expropriations now with an eye towards the best use of public funds over the long term.

Most importantly of all, the city and the province need to work together to stop authorizations to build in flood

prone areas. As recently as last year, a vacant waterside property at the end of Patrimoine Street was for sale, looking for a taker who would build on it. This was a golden opportunity for the city to acquire the vacant land and add it to the public park area that leads up to the marina. It’s unclear what happened to the property, but since no construction has been started, and no efforts to open it to the public have been kicked off, we can only assume that the current owner couldn’t find a buyer. The city should move now, before a developer takes the bait.

Preparing West Quebec for future flooding will require significant investments, so next week’s column will look at strategies to optimize our tax dollars.

LETTERS

to the **Editor** *Opinions expressed are not necessarily shared by the paper*

A revision is underway of municipal bylaws regarding peace, order, and public safety—particularly those concerning “insults”—in the MRC des Collines-de-l’Outaouais.

This initiative highlights a real tension: reconciling the authority necessary to maintain order with full respect for freedom of expression, as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

However, in its current form, the municipal bylaw leaves a troubling area of uncertainty. The distinction between permissible criticism and “insulting” remarks is based on criteria that are difficult to objectify and tends to shift the analysis of behavior toward an assessment of tone.

The problem is not the tone. It is the law.

This uncertainty is not trivial: it directly exposes the bylaw to a conflict with the Charter, the fundamental standard that governs all public action, including municipal action. Freedom of expression occupies a central place in the Charter: it protects, above all, what is disruptive—notably sharp criticism of public authorities. By establishing the vague concept of “insults” as a criterion for punishment, the bylaw ventures into territory strictly defined by constitutional law, at the risk of targeting not conduct, but words.

When the law stops regulating behavior and

starts judging the tone of speech, it crosses a line that the Charter draws very clearly.

This drift is not hypothetical—it is already happening. The same tendency to regulate tone rather than behaviour has manifested itself in the regulation of Question Period. As I wrote to the council: “Question period must remain an open forum for taxpayers, and not become a mere tool of control. What is right is right. What is wrong is wrong.” Whether through the “insults” bylaw or the framework imposed on question period, the same risk emerges: shifting from maintaining order to controlling dissent.

Added to this is a separate difficulty. Extending these rules to online expression raises a jurisdictional issue: by seeking to regulate communications that extend far beyond the local scope, the bylaw encroaches on an area—that of telecommunications—which falls under federal jurisdiction. This reality calls for increased caution, both regarding the scope and the manner of applying such provisions.

It is in this spirit that I have sent to the mayor of Chelsea, Mr. Brian Nolan, as well as to all the mayors of the MRC des Collines-de-l’Outaouais, a proposal for an amendment consistent with the Charter. This refocuses the authorities’ intervention on verifiable situations—real threats, actual obstruction,

objectively disruptive conduct—while clearly stating that expression, in and of itself, cannot be penalized solely because of its critical or incisive nature. This proposal has been reviewed from a legal perspective.

Such clarification would strengthen the regulation’s legal foundation, provide a more rigorous framework for its application, and reduce a serious risk of constitutional invalidity.

This conclusion is not controversial—it is shared by legal experts. As Professor David Fraser of Dalhousie University observed, “Chelsea should never have adopted such a bylaw and should feel some embarrassment, given how clearly it conflicts with the most fundamental

protections of freedom of expression.”

The ongoing review process provides a welcome opportunity to make the necessary adjustments. By clarifying the scope of the authorities’ intervention and clearly reaffirming the primacy of freedom of expression, the bylaw would gain in clarity, consistency, and legal soundness.

When it comes to freedom of expression, vagueness is never neutral: sooner or later, it becomes a tool for arbitrariness.

Enrico Valente
Former Council Member
(2021–2025)
Chelsea, QC

A plan for tariff negotiations

In past years, the US was the 4th largest wine supplier to Quebec with annual sales of US\$ 66 million. In Ontario, the LCBO had been the largest single customer for American alcohol with yearly purchases of \$965 million.

Over a year ago, most provinces removed all US alcohol from their shelves. US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick recently termed this action “insulting” and “disrespectful.”

I suggest that new Quebec Premier Christine Frechette put most of the wine and other US spirits back on the shelves of the SAQ. Ontario Premier Doug Ford could do the same for the LCBO. However, all items would now have a prominent, clearly-marked surtax roughly equal to the current sectoral tariffs,

eg 50% on aluminum, steel, and copper, 25-35% on softwood lumber, etc.

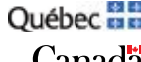
The SAQ and LCBO control the distribution and pricing of all alcohol. Apparently, CUSMA regulations do permit temporary counter-tariffs during trade disputes.

If and when President Donald Trump and Secretary Lutnick agree to reduce or cancel all sectoral tariffs, Premiers Frechette and Ford could promptly apply corresponding changes to the surtaxes.

Charles S. Shaver
Ottawa physician Dr. Charles S. Shaver was born in Montreal. He is the Former Chair of the Section on General Internal Medicine of the Ontario Medical Association. The views here are his own.

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From his teacher's perspective



After Steven MacLean's launch in Space Shuttle Columbia in 1992, his second-grade teacher Nancy MacGregor wrote the following story. Nancy has kept in touch with Steven over the years. Today, she told me, their conversations are frequently about their respective grandchildren.

A THRILLING EXPERIENCE

Every teacher wonders what career each of his/her students will choose, but I'm positive I never thought little Steven MacLean, who sat in the front seat of my grade 2 class, would become the third Canadian astronaut in space.

I had lost track of Steve over the years, and I really didn't know where he was or what he was doing until the day of the Challenger disaster in 1986. I was watching the six o'clock news and there he was –my Steven MacLean! He was commenting on the horrible explosion of the space orbiter.

A few months later I went to hear Steve give a presentation about the Canadian Space Program and his role as an astronaut. Boy, was I proud!! We met afterwards and spent some time remembering our year together at Fisher Heights Public School in Nepean. When I realized that it had been 25 years ago, we decided to have a class reunion. So, with the help of another of my grade two students whom I rediscovered that night, a dinner party was planned at my house at the end of June 1987. Steven came along with six others. We had a wonderful time catching up. Since then, I've kept in touch with Steve, often reminding him that I wanted to be there when he lifted off on his mission in space.

On July 23, 1992, I received an invitation from NASA to attend the launch in October of the Space Shuttle Columbia. I was so happy he remembered. Finally, on Tuesday, October 20, my husband George and I flew to Florida and stayed at the Holiday Inn at Cocoa Beach where many

other Canadians were staying in preparation to view the launch. The next day we were guests of NASA on a guided tour of the Kennedy Space Center. It was very impressive and included a stop for photo taking within a 1/2 mile of the shuttle as it sat on launch pad B ready for lift off. Luckily for us the rotating service assembly had already been moved aside, and the orbiter was in full view. It was a humbling experience to be so close to something so powerful.

That evening the Canadian Space Agency hosted a buffet dinner at the hotel—unfortunately, the guest of honour was in quarantine at the Space Center but we did hear a message from Nadine, Steve's wife, telling us how excited he was and how confident he was in the captain and other members of the crew. The next morning the five buses rolled up again and we all went out to the VIP launch site. The winds were gusting around fifteen knots per hour which held the actual lift off for approximately two hours. As we stood and waited in the hot sun our eyes hardly ever left the pad. Tension rose; speculations were made—would it be a “go”? Finally, over the loudspeakers we heard “minus 10 and COUNTING”—a great cheer arose from the crowd—and then silence as each one of us anticipated the action. I felt my heart pound. I held my breath. I saw the bright fire as the rockets were ignited. Over the speakers came, “We have lift off.” Tears streamed down my face as I followed Columbia up, up, up and out of sight. My dream had come true!

Photo: Nancy MacGregor with Canadian astronaut Steven MacLean at the inauguration of a school named in his honour. Nancy was Steven's grade 2 teacher. A strong supporter of science literacy and child education, he has a Doctorate in Physics from York University, Toronto. Dr. MacLean was Chief Astronaut of the Canadian Space Agency (CSA) and President of the CSA from 2008-2013.

Hungary: The Tide Goes Out



by Gwynne DYER

AUTHOR, HISTORIAN & INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk sent a message congratulating Hungary's newly elected prime minister, Peter Magyar, for having evicted long-serving populist leader Viktor Orban (aka ‘The Viktator’) from power. All the usual welcoming words, but Tusk's message ended with two slightly mysterious words in Hungarian: “Ruszkik Haza” – Russians Go Home.

There are no Russians in Hungary, apart from occasional visitors, so what was that about? It dates back to 1989, when a then-youthful student leader called Viktor Orban became an overnight national hero by giving a speech telling the Russians to end their 45-year-old military occupation and go home.

They did go home then, but their influence returned with Orban's return to the prime ministership. He had previously occupied the office as a conventional conservative in 1998-2002, but he practically invented modern populism – ‘illiberalism’, as he called it –for his comeback in 2010. And this time the Russians were with him all the way.

Hungary's value to Moscow was its membership in the European Union and NATO, which enabled it to pass on all the information that its representatives had access to as members. Orban also blocked various EU decisions that Russia disapproved of, like his recent veto of a \$105 billion EU loan to Ukraine to replace the US aid that Trump cancelled.

That loan will now go through. Repairing the huge damage done by sixteen years of Orban will take a lot longer: the judiciary has been packed, the government is a kleptocracy, the media are 80%-owned by Orban's cronies, and the electoral map has been gerrymandered. But the main interest for non-Hungarians is the possibility that this is a communicable disease.

Populists all over the place clearly fear that it might be. Orban rose to power when Donald Trump was a property developer, Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni was a junior minister, France's Marine Le Pen and Britain's Nigel Farage were fringe figures, and Germany's Alice Weidel was a financial consultant.

They all found time in their busy schedules to offer their support to Viktor Orban, and now they are strangely silent. It's like when your parents die: you realise that it's now you on the front line.

Last week, with Orban trailing badly, they pulled all the stops out. Trump, in his fifth intervention in support of Orban in

six months, posted “I AM WITH HIM ALL THE WAY”, and Vice-President JD Vance showed up in Budapest in person on the way to his equally unsuccessful performance in the ‘peace talks’ in Islamabad.

This is an unusual amount of attention to lavish on an election in a country of nine million people located in the unfashionable end of Europe. You only have to compare it to the attention that the world media gave to the 2023 election that brought Orban clone Robert Fico back to power in Slovakia.

That event got almost zero attention, whereas Sunday's election in Hungary got front-page coverage almost everywhere. The difference is entirely due to the fact that Orban's loss was seen as a defeat for the founding father for the populist strategy, at least in its current incarnation – and possibly a harbinger of the future.

The anxiety of some and the hopes of other have been stoked by the growing likelihood that the populist formula is failing in its natural homeland, the United States. Trump's own erratic behaviour is part of the problem, but the economic dislocation caused by his war against Iran is an even bigger reason for them to fear defeat in the midterm elections next November.

The governing party losing control of one House of Congress in the midterms, or even of both, is a frequent feature of national politics in the United States, and it normally doesn't cause despair. It's a protest vote, and it's not even a reliable predictor of what will happen in the general election.

Yet Trump & Co. in the United States, and even more so their fellow travelers in Europe and far-flung outposts like Argentina, seem concerned that the wind has changed, even though nobody else has noticed it yet.

Maybe they are wrong, and this is only a minor setback in their inevitable march to power everywhere in the West. But protest-based mass movements have an average lifetime of 10-15 years, so a steep decline in the health and longevity of populist governments starting about now would not be untypical.

On the other hand, Trump's desperate antics as he seeks a face-saving way out of his war on Iran are prolonging an economic downturn that could end in a major recession.

Voters punish whichever government is in power when a recession arrives with complete disregard for the actual causes, so we could see old populist regimes go down even as new ones emerge elsewhere.

Two Outaouais artists find hope in the chaos



Tashi Farmilo
LJJ Reporter

When Guy Bessette and Jacques Desgagnés look out at the world right now, they see chaos. Their answer is to make art about hope. The two Outaouais painters are bringing their work together for *Regards croisés*, an exhibition opening Thursday, June 12 at the Centre d'art contemporain de l'Outaouais, 101 rue Montcalm in Gatineau. A vernissage runs that day from 4 to 7 pm, with the show open to the public the following two weekends, June 13-14 and June 20-21, from 11 am to 6 pm. Admission is free.

The two met several years ago and recognized in each other something that goes deeper than style. Neither begins a canvas with a predetermined destination. Both describe a process in which the painting leads and the artist follows, coaxing something out of the unconscious rather than imposing a vision onto it. Their finished works look nothing alike, but they come from the same place, and that shared root is what the exhibition's title points to. *Regards croisés*, or crossed gazes, suggests two different ways of seeing that are nonetheless aimed in the same direction.

Bessette's contribution is a series of 24 abstract oil paintings called *Traverser la*



Two Outaouais painters, Guy Bessette and Jacques Desgagnés, bring their distinct but kindred visions together this June for *Regards croisés*, a free exhibition at the Centre d'art contemporain de l'Outaouais that asks whether art can offer hope in uncertain times. (TF)

PHOTO: COURTESY

nuit, contempler le jour, made between 2023 and 2026. He works in oil every day without exception, and the series accumulated the way sustained daily practice tends to – one thing leading to another, the work deciding its own shape. What began as two panels grew into groupings of six, then pulled in solitary canvases that nonetheless belong to the same story. Twenty-one of the 24 paintings are arranged into four polyptych ensembles. Throughout the process, poetry grew alongside the paintings, not to explain them but because both were coming from the same place at the same time. Visitors

can access short video clips weaving the two together by scanning QR codes in the gallery.

The title comes from a simple image that carries a lot of weight for Bessette. Night is difficulty, anxiety, the accumulated pressure of a troubled era. Day is what happens when you stop long enough to watch the sun come up and realize that everything is still capable of beginning again. He does not frame this as naïve optimism. The chaos is real. The point is that morning keeps arriving anyway.

Desgagnés comes at the same territory

from a different angle. His paintings invite what he describes as an inner journey, asking visitors to step into the work rather than stand outside it. He thinks about light the way some artists think about structure: as something both technical and alive, something that can be shaped with contrast and transparency and texture, but that also carries meaning, pointing toward the parts of human experience that resist easy description. He has spent years exploring the five senses as a framework for that kind of perception, looking for what painting can do that language cannot.

He had, at a certain point, considered walking away from painting entirely. He wondered whether some other form of expression might be waiting for him. It was not. And when Bessette proposed the exhibition, something shifted. The collaboration gave him a reason to push further into the work he had already been doing, and a context in which that work could speak to something beyond itself.

What both artists want, finally, is modest and enormous at the same time. They want someone to stand in front of a painting and feel, for a moment, that the ground is still there. That the world is not only what the news says it is. Bessette has a way of putting it that stays with you: an artist sets the table, he says. What the visitor takes from it is their own.

Eleven Outaouais municipalities competing for Quebec's top greening honour



Tashi Farmilo
LJJ Reporter

Eleven municipalities across the Outaouais are participating in the *Fleurons du Québec* program, a provincial horticultural rating system that scores communities on the quality of their green spaces and publicly visible landscaping, with the aim of driving sustained environmental improvement across Quebec.

The program, founded in 2006, dispatches trained classifiers to assess participating municipalities. The rating system, modelled on hotel stars, runs from one to five fleurons, with one indicating a community in the early stages of horticultural development and five signalling exceptional achievement across every evaluated domain. More than 300 municipalities currently hold a rating, covering close to 40 per cent of the province's population.

The Outaouais municipalities enrolled in the program are Blue Sea, Bouchette, Duhamel, L'Ange-Gardien, Maniwaki, Messines, Montebello, Ripon, Sainte-Thérèse-de-la-Gatineau, Val-des-Bois, and Val-des-Monts. Val-des-Monts, which earned



Val-des-Monts is one of eleven Outaouais municipalities taking part in the *Fleurons du Québec* program, a provincial initiative that rates communities on the quality of their green spaces and rewards those that make sustainable beautification a priority. (TF)

four fleurons in 2023, recently renewed its membership for a further three years and will welcome classifiers in the summer of 2026, with results to be announced that fall.

During each visit, classifiers examine 60 per cent of a municipality's territory, assessing everything visible to the public across five scored domains. The municipal domain, covering parks and publicly managed spaces, carries the heaviest weight. The residential

domain is also substantial, meaning the condition of private properties and front gardens feeds directly into a municipality's overall score. Schools, hospitals, and places of worship are assessed under the institutional domain, while commercial and industrial properties are evaluated separately. Community initiatives tied to sustainable development complete the picture, with composting programs, community gardens,

and the protection of mature trees all factoring in. Points across all five domains total 1,050.

The benefits of participation extend well beyond a sign at the town limits. Municipalities that hold a fleurons rating tend to see improvements in residents' quality of life and civic pride, greater appeal to outside investors and entrepreneurs, and increased tourist traffic, as the label is widely recognized by travellers across the country. Each participating municipality also receives a detailed professional report following every visit, outlining strengths and areas for improvement.

Annual Reconnaissance awards recognize standout projects in four categories: urban agriculture, greening, resident mobilization, and remarkable beautification. Outaouais communities have featured among the recipients in recent years. Maniwaki has been honoured for a project incorporating recycled tires into an urban agriculture initiative, for the use of locally emblematic wood in a landscaping project, and for integrating public art into a planted urban setting. L'Ange-Gardien received recognition for the revitalization of the riverbank at the Champboisé site.

One night in Gatineau: the trial of Joey Therrien-Rivers and Hugo Petit



Tashi Farmilo
LJ Reporter

It began as an ordinary summer evening at a Gatineau restaurant and ended, nearly three years later, with two men weeping in a packed courtroom and a judge declaring that the truth of what happened that night could not be established beyond a reasonable doubt.

On the evening of June 22, 2023, the first complainant and a group of her friends arrived at Sans Façon, a restaurant owned by Joey Therrien-Rivers. She had been seeing Therrien-Rivers casually for a few weeks. Her friends left as the night wore on, but she stayed, intending to sleep at his place. The second complainant was also at the restaurant that evening. When the restaurant closed, Therrien-Rivers and his longtime friend Hugo Petit, a lawyer, headed to Therrien-Rivers' condominium with both women.

What happened there became the central dispute of the entire case, and the two sides told irreconcilable stories about it.

The first complainant testified that her memory of the condo had significant gaps. She told the court she believed she may have been drugged, though she could not be certain. It was only the following morning, she said, that fragmented recollections began to surface. She described breaking down in front of her mother, going silent for ten minutes, crying, and feeling deep shame. The defence, in cross-examination, pointed to inconsistencies with her initial police statement, a follow-up video statement, her preliminary inquiry testimony in late 2024, and what she said at trial. She acknowledged that some details had shifted as memories returned, and that on other points she simply could not recall.

The second complainant said that upon arriving at the condo, the first complainant had been vomiting and appeared so unsteady that they agreed she should go straight to bed. She then described what she characterized as a consensual encounter with Petit on the living room couch but also alleged that Therrien-Rivers emerged from his bedroom multiple times and that during one of those moments, while she was undressed and vulnerable, he assaulted her.

Therrien-Rivers took the stand himself. He described the night as festive, insisted everyone present had been on the same page, and said Petit had later entered the bedroom without warning to join him and the first complainant. Petit did not testify.

The trial cracked open decisively on its fourth day. Under cross-examination, the second complainant acknowledged she had consented to a sexual relationship with Petit. The Crown prosecutors, having heard that admission, advised the court the following



Two Gatineau men were acquitted of all sexual assault charges on April 29, after a trial stemming from a single night in June 2023, having already lost their careers and businesses to public condemnation before a judge ever ruled in their favour. (TF)

PHOTO: COURTESY OF JOEY THERRIEN-RIVERS' AND HUGO PETIT'S RESPECTIVE FACEBOOK PAGES

day that they could no longer prove the charges related to the second complainant beyond a reasonable doubt, and sought directed acquittals on two of the three counts. She effectively became a witness rather than a complainant, and one charge remained.

Judge Mark Philippe of the Quebec Court returned on April 29 to deliver his verdict on that final count. After more than an hour reviewing the evidence, he concluded that reasonable doubt existed on the question of consent. He was careful to note that his role was not to decide whose version was more credible, only whether the essential element of the offence had been proven. He found it had not. He added that genuine confusion remained about the sequence of events that night, declared both men not guilty, and brought the proceedings to a close.

The ruling had originally been scheduled

for April 21, but a power outage that struck part of downtown Gatineau, including the courthouse, had forced a week-long delay.

When the words finally came, Petit broke down in tears and held onto Therrien-Rivers as the gallery, filled with family and friends, looked on. Neither complainant was present to hear the decision.

Outside the courtroom, defence lawyer Michel Swanston did not hold back. He described the intervening years as devastating. Therrien-Rivers, he said, had been forced to sell all three of his Outaouais restaurants, Le Foubrac, Sans Façon, and Meech & Munch, because customers stopped coming once the accusations became public. Petit had been stripped of his ability to practise law in the city; his firm had cut ties with him the day his arrest was reported; and, the Barreau du Québec had renewed restrictions on his licence

three times over. He had been compelled to relocate and work under tight limitations, far from the career he had built.

Swanston argued that social media had rendered its own verdict long before any judge could, and that the presumption of innocence had been effectively discarded in the court of public opinion. He said justice had been done, and that the court had accepted what the defence had argued throughout.

The Crown indicated it would review the written judgement before deciding whether to appeal any of the acquittals. Whether Therrien-Rivers or Petit will pursue legal action of their own remains an open question, with their lawyer noting both men would need time before making any such decision.

What is not in dispute is that all four people who left that restaurant together on the night of June 22, 2023, have had their lives irrevocably altered by what followed.

IKEA is opening a Plan and Order point in Gatineau



Jude Osmond

Öppning (Welcome in Swedish): IKEA is opening a new Plan and Order point at 1100 Maloney Ouest Boulevard in Gatineau on May 11. This is IKEA's second location in the Ottawa-Gatineau area, following the immensely popular store in Ottawa.

The Plan and Order point is different from the big showroom store in Ottawa. At this new location, customers can plan major purchases such as kitchen appliances,

bedroom and living room furniture and more. One popular service is meeting with IKEA experts to design spaces, help customers envision their home and make their dream rooms a reality.

"It's really to support customers and help build their dream room," said Keresha Busquine, IKEA Ottawa's Market Manager.

The goals for the new store in Gatineau were to reduce travel for the Outaouais region to other locations like Ottawa and Montreal, to bring an IKEA closer to the region, and to make shopping more

accessible.

The IKEA experts on-site are employees with backgrounds in architecture and design, and they are very passionate and ready to help. "They are excited to take someone's wish and make it a reality," Busquine said.

This will be Canada's thirteenth Plan and Order point and the sixth in Quebec.

The official ribbon-cutting opening ceremony will take place on May 11, and there will be items on sale and ready to purchase.



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Campagne majeure de 6 M\$ pour Moisson Outaouais



MéliSSa Gélinas

Devant la hausse fulgurante des demandes d'aide alimentaires en Outaouais, Moisson Outaouais, qui dessert 51 organismes de la région, est fière d'annoncer le lancement d'une campagne majeure de financement de 6 M\$.

Intitulé «Grandir ensemble», ce projet permettra d'augmenter considérablement l'approvisionnement alimentaire des organismes afin de répondre à la demande croissante, qui pourrait atteindre 120 000 personnes par mois d'ici 2027.

Grâce au fond d'infrastructure du Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec (MAPAQ), plus de 1 M\$ ont déjà été amassés. Moisson Outaouais fait maintenant appel au public et aux entreprises pour atteindre un objectif de 3,5 M\$.

AGRANDIR POUR MIEUX SERVIR

Le premier volet du projet consiste en l'agrandissement de 8 200 pieds carrés de l'entrepôt, ce qui augmentera la capacité d'entreposage des aliments ainsi que la capacité de récupération.

Par la suite, la cuisine sera également agrandie afin de tripler la production passant de 800 à 3 000 repas

par jour. Cette transformation permettra notamment d'augmenter le nombre d'établissements scolaires desservis, qui passera de 6 à 20 d'ici 2029.

Le dernier volet sera consacré à la création d'espaces communautaires, incluant une salle multifonctionnelle accessible à tous, des espaces adaptés pour l'équipe ainsi que des lieux favorisant la collaboration, l'apprentissage et les échanges avec les partenaires.

Pour davantage d'information sur la campagne de financement : <https://campagne.moissonoutaouais.com/>.

CONTEXTE RÉGIONAL

En quatre ans, l'Outaouais a connu une hausse de 48 % des demandes. Cela représente plus de 94 000 demandes d'aide alimentaire, avec plus de 162 785 kilogrammes de nourriture distribués en 2025.

Parmi les demandeurs, 36,9 % sont des enfants, 21 % des travailleurs et près de 50 % des familles.

LES ENFANTS DE PLUS EN PLUS AFFECTÉS

Face à la hausse préoccupante des besoins chez les enfants, Moisson Outaouais a mis en place, il y a deux ans, un service de repas dans les écoles en collaboration avec La Cantine pour tous. Selon le revenu familial, un montant variant entre 1 \$ et 6 \$ est demandé pour permettre aux enfants d'avoir accès à des repas sains et nutritifs.

Pour plus d'information : <https://lacantinepourtous.org/>.

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Western Quebec School Board picks Proulx to lead in high-stakes era



Tashi Farmilo
Local Journalism Initiative

OUTAOUAIS - A veteran of nearly two decades with the Western Quebec School Board (WQSB), Pascal Proulx, was chosen to lead the organization through one of the most consequential periods in the history of English-language education in Quebec. The Council of Commissioners voted unanimously on April 28 to appoint Proulx as director general, effective June 1.

It's a role he has spent his entire career preparing for, even if it was never quite his plan. Proulx arrived in Gatineau from Sherbrooke in 1999 and took a job at the WQSB as an IT technician. Over the years, he worked his way through nearly every corner of the organization, leading departments ranging from human resources and finance to transportation, technology, and school organization. He left briefly in 2008 to join the Commission scolaire des Draveurs, where he became director of Technology, School Organization and Transportation while completing a Master's of Administration, before returning to the WQSB in 2014. For the past three years, he has served as assistant director general. Of his 23 years in education, 18 have been spent with the WQSB.

When it came time to find a successor to outgoing director general George Singfield, Council Chair Joanne Labadie said the hiring committee spent two months reviewing candidates from across the country.

Proulx steps into the role at a pivotal moment. The WQSB has been at the



Pascal Proulx was recently chosen to lead the WQSB through one of the most consequential periods in the history of English-language education in Quebec.

(WQSB)

forefront of the legal battle against Bill 40, provincial legislation that sought to abolish elected English school boards and give the provincial government authority to appoint school board leadership directly. The Quebec Court of Appeal struck down key sections of the bill as unconstitutional in April 2025, but the fight for English minority language rights in Quebec is far from over.

For Labadie, finding a leader who grasped that reality was central to the council's decision.

"We were really hoping to have a candidate who understood the nuances of the political situation and who would continue to work on preserving English language rights across our school system,

but also the region," she said.

Proulx said his immediate priorities include continuing to support schools, centres, and departments in delivering quality services, and addressing succession planning as a high number of retirements are expected over the next three years. Looking further ahead, he plans to complete the board's current 2023-2027 strategic plan and lead the development of a new five-year vision in collaboration with staff and the community.

Singfield, who is retiring on July 25, spent roughly

40 years in education, beginning as a supply teacher and then serving as a vice-principal, principal, and secretary general, ultimately becoming director general in June 2023.

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AVIS PUBLIC PUBLIC NOTICE

Projets de règlements relatifs au jour, à l'heure et au lieu des séances ordinaires du conseil des commissaires et du comité exécutif de la Commission scolaire Western Québec pour l'année scolaire 2026-2027

AVIS PUBLIC est par la présente donné que lors de son assemblée ordinaire du 28 avril 2026, le conseil des commissaires de la commission scolaire Western Québec a adopté les résolutions C-25/26-121 et 122 concernant les projets de règlements cités en titre. Ledit calendrier sera adopté à l'occasion de l'assemblée régulière du 30 juin 2026.

Les textes des projets de règlements peuvent être consultés au centre administratif, situé au 15, rue Katimavik, Gatineau, durant les heures de bureau où sur le site Web: westernquebec.ca

By-Laws fixing the day, time, and place of the regular meetings of the Council of Commissioners and of the Executive Committee of the Western Québec School Board for the 2026-2027 school year.

PUBLIC NOTICE is hereby given that at its regular public meeting held on April 28, 2026, the Council of Commissioners of the Western Québec School Board adopted resolutions C-25/26-121 and 122 for the above-mentioned By-Laws. The calendar of meetings will be adopted at the regular meeting on June 30, 2026.

The full texts of the By-Laws are available for public consultation at the administration office, situated at 15 Katimavik, Gatineau, during regular office hours or on the Board's website: westernquebec.ca

Donné à Gatineau, Québec le 30 avril 2026
Eldon Keon, secrétaire général

Given at Gatineau, Québec, April 30, 2026
Eldon Keon, Secretary General



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**EXCESSIVE CHARGES IMPOSED ON NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES
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Publishers are committed to recycling. But the dramatic and unsustainable scale of proposed new fees on newspapers and magazines raises concerns about the future viability of Quebec's news ecosystem and the communities that depend on it.

