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**Standing Committee on
Public Accounts**

Committee business

1st Session
44th Parliament
Monday 4 May 2026

**Comité permanent des
comptes publics**

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1^{re} session
44^e législature
Lundi 4 mai 2026

Chair: Tom Rakocevic
Clerk: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Président : Tom Rakocevic
Greffière : Thushitha Kobikrishna

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CONTENTS

Monday 4 May 2026

Committee business.....P-149

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES COMPTES PUBLICS

Monday 4 May 2026

Lundi 4 mai 2026

The committee met at 1236 in room 151.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to call the meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order.

The first item on the agenda today is a filed notice of motion by MPP Fairclough. I will now turn the floor over to MPP Hsu to move her motion.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Chair, I move that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts request that the Auditor General undertake a special audit to investigate why the date of completion for construction of the Kingston dock for the Wolfe Island ferry is now expected in 2028, when it was 2023 in the original procurement.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We'll now move to debate. Is there any debate? MPP Hsu.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I'd like to first tell the members of this committee a little bit, very briefly, about Wolfe Island, because you might not be familiar with it.

Wolfe Island is part of the Frontenac Islands township municipality. It's a rural municipality in my riding of Kingston and the Islands. It's connected to the mainland by a ferry service which, in recent years, has become unreliable.

What has happened on Wolfe Island as a result of this infrastructure issue: We've had a primary care medical clinic close. Contractors avoid working there because of the uncertainty. Tourism jobs have been wiped out. Young families are moving away. Last September, Marysville Public School on the island had two students registered. And the median age of residents is going up every time there's a census.

We got a new electric ferry, the Wolfe Islander IV. It needs a new ferry dock, but its construction has been delayed from 2023, over the years, until—the latest is 2028, when the expected completion is supposed to be. This is important, because it contains charging infrastructure for the electric ferry, and without it, up to now, the new electric ferry has been running on backup diesel generators that are on the boat. It has been running on them all of the time, instead of on batteries. It was designed to run on batteries with chargers at the docks, and that's how it's supposed to run. One small consequence is that the crossing takes 80 minutes now instead of 60 minutes, because it's running in backup mode.

This has contributed to many ferry outages for Wolfe Island. Just last December, two days before Christmas, we had a major outage, a multi-day outage. Families were

stranded. Essential grocery deliveries stopped. Propane deliveries were stopped. Milk produced on the island was dumped. So many stories from residents—and I understand that the government received many, many emails and other communications from residents of the island.

The incomplete Kingston dock, which has contributed to outages over the last couple of years, makes other outages worse. In December, the Wolfe Islander IV then could not run.

We had another problem which has since been resolved. The Wolfe Islander III, the older ferry, was in dry dock. One replacement was brought in, the Frontenac II, but it couldn't be used as a backup because the Kingston ferry dock—because preliminary steps had been taken to modify the primary dock. It was in the middle of construction, but it wasn't finished. The Frontenac II could not dock and could not be used as a backup. There's a secondary dock in the plan for their new ferry dock, but it hadn't been commissioned yet.

The minister has taken a lot of flak from the public for the disruptions to the ferry and, as I've said before, a big contributor has been delays to the Kingston ferry dock construction. I don't know how much is the fault of elected officials. Maybe it's not their fault. How much is the fault of the ministry's procurement processes? I don't know. How much is the contractor's fault? All of these things could be resolved or clarified with the work of the Auditor General. I think we could clear the air, given how much the residents of Wolfe Island have suffered. We could learn how to help ensure that this doesn't happen again. And I think it's a bite-sized audit project, which should teach us broader lessons about how to get things built.

The Kingston Wolfe Island ferry dock is a case where we're not getting something built. In fact, it has been delayed for five years now.

I really appreciate the opportunity to bring this motion to this committee to ask the Auditor General to undertake a special audit. I have written letters to the Auditor General before, but each time they've said, "Well, we'll keep you in mind for the future, but we've already decided what we want to work on this year." So we're hoping that this committee will ask the Auditor General, because of the special privileges this committee has, to include a study of the Kingston ferry dock in one of its reports.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Further debate? MPP Dixon.

Ms. Jess Dixon: I indicate the government side will not be voting in favour of the motion. While we understand

the challenges that are faced by this area, at this point in time, there is a completion date in 2027 that the government and contractor are actively targeting. At this point in time, in part due to some of the challenges with the project, this project is now very assiduously managed by the ministry, with a great deal of oversight.

Given the Auditor General's role as far as appropriate spending of public money, I think, at this point in time, launching an audit into the process while the process continues to be ongoing is not a particularly effective use of her time. Also, I think there is a real likelihood that it would run the risk of delaying it still further as those who are supposed to be working on this project are instead having to pull significant amounts of documentation for the Auditor General to do a review of a process that is not even completed, where she wouldn't be able to provide that.

So at this point in time, they're tracking for completion in spring of 2027, and as the minister has said multiple times when pressed on this subject, it is now—I mean, from the beginning, but it is particularly a situation where all efforts are already focused on keeping the project moving and accelerating completion, and I think we should stay focused on that.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Further debate? MPP Hsu.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I'm not going to try to argue for too long, but let me just say that I have no doubt that the minister and the minister's office and the ministry are paying a lot of attention now to the construction of the Wolfe Island ferry dock given all of the outcry and the attention that it has gotten. But even if it gets completed in 2027, which—I think the ministry wants to be careful and not say that it's guaranteed to finish in 2027, and that's where this 2028 number came out, in a press report. I have no doubt that the ministry is really focused on it now, but a lot of things happened to move the completion date, first from 2023 to another later date, and then another later date, until finally it has gotten to 2027. I don't believe the ministry officials, the public servants, are ready to guarantee that it's going to be finished by spring of 2027.

There's a lot to look at, before we got into the state we're in now—and as I say, I have no doubt the ministry is paying a lot of attention to the construction as it is right now, the stage that it's in right now. But a lot of things happened before that are now coming to light, and it may have nothing to do with the government of the day. It may have to do with procurement processes. It may have to do with the contractor.

I think because, in the next few years, we're all hoping to get things done and get things built, seeing an example

of something that has not gotten built—and it's not an enormous project. I think we should study and ask the Auditor General to study why—now would be a good time to know why, for all the other building that we want to do in this province.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Further debate? MPP Fairclough.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: It's good to hear that there's going to be some commitment to getting the project done, given the impact that we're seeing for Wolfe Island.

I'm really struck by the fact, actually, that you've not even been able to fully utilize the new ferry that was invested in and you've had to rely on diesel, especially in these times.

I do feel there is something to learn from this, as you say. The timing for when this would fit into the Auditor General's to-do list, given she has some commitments, may well work—but the project may be completed. I think it's just good for the committee to think about these examples in that spirit of, how do we get to something better and get to delivering something better in the future? I just wanted to make that comment.

It's also good, I think, for a committee like this to understand the implications to a local community of this kind of delay and something that is just about getting the dock built.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Further debate? MPP Hsu.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I'll just add to the comment made by my colleague MPP Lee Fairclough.

I believe the Auditor General has decided what they want to work on in 2026. So any kind of audit wouldn't start until 2027—some time, anyway. If what everybody hopes, including the government—if that Kingston ferry dock construction is completed and commissioned by early 2027, which is what MPP Dixon brought up, that would be great. But it means that the audit is not going to start before that happens, so I think that last point shouldn't come into consideration.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Further debate? Seeing none, are members ready to vote? All those in favour? Opposed?

Mr. Ted Hsu: Can I record a vote, please?

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Sorry. It's too late for a recorded vote; I've been told by the Clerk.

I declare the motion lost.

We will now recess for five minutes to allow the committee to move into closed session for report-writing.

The committee recessed at 1249 and later continued in closed session.

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