The Lake Report

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Hyper-local news for Niagara-on-the-Lake

Virgil Stampede returns | Page 11

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Avian tourists hit the road

Geese and goslings take in the scenery on Queen Street – minus the gelato

The Canada goose might have a reputation for its unbridled aggression, but aren't the little ones just so cute? This family of geese and goslings were seen making their way through Niagara-on-the-Lake's downtown core on May 2. Photographer Dave Van de Laar escorted them to the lake safely. They're in the midst of breeding season, so expect to see more younglings in your neighbourhood this spring. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Patios a no-go on Queen Street this year as council ends pandemic relief

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

The lord mayor's last-gasp attempt to bring outdoor street patios back to Niagara-on-the-Lake's downtown core this season failed last Tuesday night.

Council voted against a short-term plan that would've allowed a select few businesses to reopen their temporary patios on Queen Street, which were closed at the end of last year after the town decided to shut down the patio program it introduced during the pandemic in 2020.

The program was meant to be a temporary solution to let restaurants, bars and cafes open outdoor dining space and bypass the typical process for erecting a patio in Old Town during provincewide indoor dining restrictions. It was renewed every year for the next five years.

Last spring, following ongoing concerns around the temporary patios impacting the downtown core's streetscape, cutting into municipal parking revenue and creating an unequal playing field for Queen Street dining establishments, council

Continued on Page 2

Old Town restaurants like the Irish Harp Pub will no longer be able to operate the temporary patios that were put in place during the pandemic to help boost business while people were limited indoors. FILE

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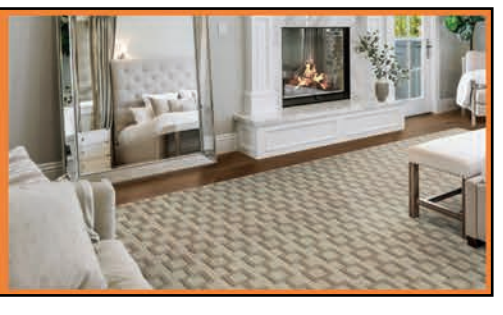

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No patio season on Queen Street this year in NOTL

Continued from Front Page

Restaurants and bars in the heritage district were ordered to close their patios at the end of last year. FILE

voted to end it and set the goal of creating a permanent program in the future that addresses these issues.

Right now, the town is working on a secondary plan for Queen Street, which will guide several parts of how the historic commercial core operates, including patios and the relationship of outdoor dining spaces to municipal heritage, mobility and public access.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa introduced a motion on April 28 to allow some temporary patios on Queen Street until the secondary plan is done and in effect, but only where patios can be placed entirely within town-owned parking spaces.

Zalepa acknowledged that council has had its issues with the temporary program — he said this latest proposal was him trying to offer something it could get behind.

"It's true this council made a decision not to go ahead with the permanent, seasonal patio program," he said. "I thought, in that light, we would try to do something very limited."

In the end, council voted against the plan 3-6, with Couns. Andrew Niven and Wendy Cheropita and Zalepa voting in favour of it and the rest against it.

This plan would've had several caveats: acceptable patios could not encroach onto private property or take up any accessibility parking spots and business owners would've needed to submit a traffic safety plan, ensure emergency access, waste management, visibility and streetscape integrity, among other requirements.

Cheropita said she's heard from several residents who've enjoyed the presence of patios on Queen Street, dining outside during the warmer months.

"I get a lot of calls from residents that say, 'Why did you cancel the patio program?' And I still keep getting them," she said.

She pointed out that, as per Zalepa's motion, the completion of the Queen Street secondary plan could take up to two years — so, in the meantime, the town should offer people whatever it can.

"Those patios that were there, that were removed, were all busy. They were full all the time. Obviously, that shows how popular they were," she said.

Coun. Maria Mavridis, however, said that while she likes the outdoor patios and the "vibrancy" they bring to the heritage district, the latest plan on the table would only allow a select few of the dozens of businesses on Queen Street to open patios.

She said, based on her understanding of the proposed rules, two of the 32 businesses in the historic commercial core could reopen their patios.

"It's hard to say it's a fair and equitable program when it's only for two restaurants of out of the 32 in downtown," she said.

The past five years, the temporary patio program faced a few key points of criticism: the patios alter Old Town's streetscape; the patios, which sat on town-owned parking spots, take away revenue from the municipality; and businesses benefitted financially from these patios without paying the typical costs for having a patio, which businesses with permanent patios paid.

It was these concerns and others that led to the town shuttering the temporary patio program and electing to figure out a lasting solution that fits in with a long-term plan for Queen Street.

Mavridis said on Tuesday it would be better for the town to finish its Queen Street secondary plan and bring the patios back in a fair and equitable way.

"I think we just need to properly follow the process," she said, adding that coming up with something for the upcoming tourist season is "not feasible."

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Bell choir rings at Bethany

The Niagara Bethany Handbell Choir is celebrating five decades of music, companionship and charity this year. The youth music ensemble marked the 50th anniversary of its formation with a special concert at Bethany Mennonite Church on Sunday, May 3, performing sacred hymns, classical music and Disney favourites.
DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Goettler says he'll be a full-time mayor

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

Four years ago, Vaughn Goettler saw the writing on the wall for the possible future of Niagara-on-the-Lake, but he says his foresight is no cause for celebration.

The longtime entrepreneur turned philanthropist who calls NOTL home ran in the town's 2022 municipal election for lord mayor opposing the threat of Niagara's amalgamation as one of his key platform points.

Now, as the prospect of the amalgamation of Niagara resurfaces this year, Goettler is back in the thick of it to try his hand again at becoming the town's lord mayor.

"I spoke about amalgamation, and everybody looked like I'd come from another planet," he said of his position in 2022. He said he'd read about news of the province considering amalgamation for a handful of its regions, and Niagara was on "the hit-list."

"Even though it had become quiet, I was trying to warn people that Doug Ford — like him or not, doesn't matter — tends to make good on what he speaks about at some point or another," he said.

Come 2026, former Niagara Region chair Bob Gale's letter to the Municipal Affairs Minister in February floating the idea of amalgamation ignited controversy across the region and calls from many to reconsider the idea of combining Niagara's municipalities into one big city.

Vaughn Goettler says he's focused on protecting NOTL from amalgamation and ensuring development doesn't continue "uncontrolled" in town. FILE

Gale backed down on the idea before he resigned from the role in March, however, Goettler said one failed attempt doesn't mean amalgamation is off the table.

"I think it's an ever-present danger," he said.

That perceived threat and the other concerns for the future of NOTL, including what he called "uncontrolled" development happening in town, are why he's tossing his hat back in the ring.

"We will lose our unique status and heritage as a community if we just become consumed into a broader region," he said.

Goettler shared his perspective on a few of the most contentious planned projects for Old Town, including the redevelopment of the old hospital at 176 Wellington St.

The future of that site, he said, "should not look like a parking lot." He spoke favourably of the Burton Family Foundation's proposal to turn the building into a community hub.

"I was very impressed with the level of analysis that (James Burton) had done and his plan to have it not cost the taxpayer any money, which is refreshing to hear," he said.

In his 2022 campaign, Goettler spoke of the need to have a tourism strategy that address traffic, parking and related issues. The Burton foundation's proposal, he said, would allow there to be some parking accommodation while not turning institutional land into a parking lot.

He added that the town should consider the Fort George National Historic Site's parking lot as an option for visitors driving into town.

On development in general, he said NOTL is experiencing a time of "significant slippage" and, if things don't change, could end up resembling a city like Mississauga, with high-rises and "jammed-in" developments.

"If we don't take a very serious look at what we're doing, how we're doing it and come up with some pretty firm rules, with teeth in them, I think that we will continue to see slippage."

He's not against all the change NOTL is experiencing: he spoke favourably of the new Royal George Theatre, for example, saying he's not opposed to the 110-year-old theatre being replaced and the accessibility the new venue will have.

He said he did take issue with the initial facade design the Shaw Festival presented in mid-2025, but feels the redesigned facade, which will imitate the look of the current face of the theatre, is an improvement.

"I hope the George will come to be recognized and accepted as a respectful renovation and improvement to an area that didn't exist before, with all they've done now."

When he last ran for lord mayor, he said he felt NOTL was at a crossroads between what it was and what it could be. However, he said, that doesn't mean the town has passed this crossroads, reaching a point of no return.

"I think there's still time to do something, if it's immediate," he said. "If it miss it in the next 12 months, we've missed the train ... it's absolutely critical that we hit the deck running."

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Andrea Kaiser enters mayoral race as NOTL risks losing regional voice

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Andrea Kaiser and her dog, Millie, at the McFarland Park picnic pavilion in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Kaiser says the town's parks are among the many reasons she loves it. PAIGE SEBURN

Andrea Kaiser has always had ambitions to run for lord mayor one of these days, but a looming shakeup at Niagara Region pushed her to act now.

Kaiser, who represents Niagara-on-the-Lake on regional council, is running for the town's top elected job as it faces the possible loss of one of its two seats at the regional table.

Bill 100 would shrink regional council from 32 members to 13: the 12 local mayors and a regional chair, starting in the 2026–2030 term. If passed, it would eliminate Kaiser's current seat, leaving NOTL represented at the region by its lord mayor alone.

In an interview, Kaiser said the proposed regional changes are the biggest threat facing the town right now, especially with the possibility of the province of Ontario appointing the regional chair and expanding the powers of the role — she said she perceives this process as "undemocratic."

"This new regional chair will have veto powers over the mayors, and that's shocking to me," Kaiser said. "Someone with so much power at the region, who is appointed and would override decisions of those publicly elected."

Kaiser said she is also "very, very concerned" about the potential weighting of mayors at the region and is "absolutely opposed to any form of amalgamation."

"I will do everything within my power and ability to make sure Niagara-on-the-Lake stays whole as a municipality and that we have a strong voice."

Kaiser said before all of this came about, her plan was to seek another four years as a regional councillor.

"I had planned to run for mayor after this term," she said. "There's some work and some things that I would like to finish at the region."

Her roots in NOTL go back decades.

Kaiser moved to NOTL when she was five, grew up on Line 3 and later raised her children in the community. She is the daughter of the late Karl Kaiser, a co-founder of the Inniskillin estate winery, and has also worked in the local wine industry, including about two decades at Reif Estate Winery.

She served as a NOTL councillor from 2003 to 2014. She has held the role as the town's regional councillor since 2022 and now lives in Queenston.

> "I feel like a lot of residents, in talking to them, don't feel heard."
>
> ANDREA KAISER
> LORD MAYOR CANDIDATE

"I think I have a lot to offer to Niagara-on-the-Lake," she said. "It's home. It's always been home."

Kaiser said her campaign will focus on what she sees as a divide in the community.

"I've seen that there seems to be this notion of us versus them in the last, maybe, eight years," she said. "I really want to work hard to find more commonalities within residents."

She said her years working for the region and town showed her that NOTL needs better transit, seniors services and more affordable housing, which she said she plans to address.

In the coming months, she plans to meet with residents and associations "to get a better sense of residents' concerns."

"I feel like a lot of residents, in talking to them, don't feel heard," she said.

Kaiser said she would still have another part-time job if elected as lord mayor.

"But that's not to say that I wouldn't put in full-time hours."

Her comments come after an April 29 opinion column published in The Lake Report by Garth Turner that said fellow candidate Vaughn Goettler "won't be a part-time politician."

"I read that," said Kaiser. "I'm kind of concerned."

She said there is a perception that candidates who cannot work full time "are not going to do a good job," adding that, at the current salary, only a small number of people in the community can afford to take on the role full-time.

"I just feel all candidates should have equal ground and equal access to the position," she said.

The 2026 salary for the lord mayor is is set at $55,320.20, according to town communications staff.

She said if NOTL residents want a full-time mayor, "then you need to be prepared to pay a wage that makes sense for a position of full-time."

Kaiser also weighed in on several current town issues.

On the former hospital site, she said community use and the overall look of the building is key.

"If there is a little bit of extra parking to accommodate, that can't be a bad thing, I don't think," she said. "But I think the priority has to be on the community use and how it also looks."

Kaiser said she spent a number of years on the municipal heritage committee and understands how important streetscapes are.

She said the parking debate may have overshadowed some of the more community-focused aspects of staff's reports.

"The fear of it being used for parking is real," she said, "but I think if you sort of take a closer look at the structure that's going to come out, there is a significant (amount) that is related to cultural and community use."

Asked about the James A. Burton & Family Foundation's proposal for the site, Kaiser said she does not know enough about it yet to comment.

On Pride flag raisings, amid discussions lately about municipalities paying to take part in related events, Kaiser said, "I don't think support should come at a price tag."

She also commented on a directive issued in February by the town's chief administrative officer limiting how staff respond to media questions.

"I am very much about being an open book and transparent."

She said elected officials should explain their decisions, even when unpopular.

"I'm okay to have those hard conversations," Kaiser said.

On bylaw enforcement, she said rules should be applied fairly.

She said she largely agrees with the town's "engage, educate, enforce" approach, but noted "every case is different."

If elected, Kaiser said she would focus on listening, helping residents understand decisions and being open to new information.

"Making people feel heard and actually listening is really important," she said.

"I can also have my opinions changed by facts and conversations."

Kaiser is not looking at the role as a one-term plan. She said she would consider running again if residents support her leadership.

"I'm not going anywhere," she said. "I'm committed to Niagara-on-the-Lake."

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Weston Miller wants to bring 'resident-first' leadership

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Weston Miller, president of the Chautauqua Residents Association, is running for Niagara-on-the-Lake council with a focus on protecting residents' quality of life. FILE

Weston Miller says Niagara-on-the-Lake is at a turning point.

"If we're not thoughtful about the decisions that we make today, tomorrow, we might not recognize the town we all love," he said in an interview.

Miller, a NOTL realtor who serves as president of the Chautauqua Residents Association, treasurer of the Niagara Foundation, a board and governance committee member at Royal Oak School and a planning committee member for the Shaw Festival's annual Shivaree fundraiser, is positioning himself as a candidate focused on residents, quality of life, transparency and carefully managed growth.

"For me, it's about bringing a resident-first voice to council," he said, one that is "really connected to the community, prepared to ask the hard questions, and focused and determined to protect what makes Niagara-on-the-Lake such a special place to live."

A lifelong resident, Miller said his decision to run comes from a deep connection to the community and a desire to see it protected.

"I really care about the quality of life of the people who live here, not only the people who live here, but work here, raise their families here."

Miller said development pressure is one of the biggest issues facing the town and, if not managed carefully, could change what makes NOTL unique.

"Growth is inevitable, but it really has to be thoughtful and it has to be rooted in the long-term interests of residents," he said.

He said new development should respect bylaws, heritage and infrastructure, and fit within the character of existing neighbourhoods.

On the former hospital site, Miller said the priority should be clear.

"No matter what happens there, it needs to service the community and it needs to service the residents."

On the issue of communication, Miller raised concerns about how the town deals with the media.

"Information needs to be provided," he said.

"We have a spectacular local media in this town … a wide array of opinion writers."

"I believe that if there's information that's being requested by residents — and let's not forget, not only is this the press, but it's residents as well — the town has a duty to provide it as per the legislation," he said.

The concerns follow a statement earlier this year from the town's chief administrative officer directing staff not to respond to opinion-based media requests and to focus on factual and policy-related questions.

Miller said people should not have to file freedom of information requests to get basic information. He has filed them himself and said he found they can take a long time and be difficult to navigate.

He also voiced support for the Shaw Festival's role in town, calling it "a very important cultural cornerstone for our community."

On the Royal George Theatre redevelopment and related judicial review, he said there are many moving pieces.

Miller said he did not have enough information to comment fully on the Pride flag issue, which this year involved debate over how municipalities show support for Pride events, including potential financial contributions.

"I wouldn't want anything to happen, through lack of action or action, that would perhaps be misconstrued as a lack of support for the LGBTQ community in town. That's for sure."

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- Richard Harley, publisher

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The Lake Report

Town enforces bylaws against tulip festival opening weekend

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

Banani Jena from Brampton poses for a photo amid thousands of tulips at TASC Tulip Farm on Saturday. The town says the spring tulip festival is running without the necessary municipal approvals, but its co-owner says it's zoned appropriately. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Blue skies brought a smoother opening weekend at TASC Tulip Farm than last year, but a storm is building as the town says the festival is operating in violation of its bylaws.

The TASC Tulip Festival opened last week at Frank Boendermaker and Jill McCourt's 55-acre tulip farm on Line 3 Road, where three million tulips are planted for viewing and picking.

The town says the festival lacks required municipal approvals, placing the operation under active bylaw enforcement during its peak late-April-to-May season and exposing it to fines under new special events rules adopted after last year's traffic and mud problems.

Town spokesperson Marah Minor told The Lake Report the municipality has received "a number of complaints" about the festival, including traffic congestion, operating without the appropriate municipal permissions and "issues similar to those raised last year."

"At this time, the festival is not in compliance with town regulations," said Minor. "Municipal enforcement staff are actively enforcing the town's bylaws and working with the organizers to address the concerns and bring them into compliance."

Coun. Maria Mavridis said in a public statement on April 17 that the festival is proceeding without required zoning approvals and without a special event permit application.

Mavridis said town staff are taking a "measured and progressive enforcement approach," beginning with a fine for advertising and promoting an event without the required permit. Further fines would follow if the event proceeds without approval, she said.

McCourt disputes the town's position. She said the farm is zoned agricultural and that the operation has approval for the annual flower-picking event.

"I think (Mavridis) did not do her homework," McCourt said. "We've been working with the town as much as possible, we have hired consultants — we have to try to do everything right."

Mavridis said the flower-picking event can indeed fall under agricultural use, but the size of the operation, its large attendance, vendors and commercial activity make it a special event that requires municipal approval.

"If proper site-specific zoning were approved, this type of event could proceed," Mavridis said in the statement. "But without those approvals, the current operations are considered non-compliant."

McCourt said the dispute has been worsened by poor communication among town departments and a lack of direct contact with the business.

"We applied for our permit in April and October," McCourt said. "And then we just get this thing posted on Facebook and we actually didn't appreciate that."

The enforcement dispute follows a difficult 2025 spring opening, when heavy rain left vehicles stuck in mud and traffic backed up near the farm. Boendermaker later apologized to council and said the business had spent $40,000 to address the mud problem.

Council later rejected TASC's request for a fall festival permit. Councillors who voted against that request cited the spring traffic problems, the size of the proposed operation and its potential impact on neighbours.

McCourt said TASC has invested far more since then. She said drainage work, hay, wood chips and parking improvements have cost TASC close to $100,000.

The festival site is also larger this year, with a 1.5-acre show garden, more space for visitors and parking changes meant to reduce backups. She said the farm has a plan to reschedule tickets if heavy rain threatens the site again.

"Mother Nature is the deciding factor," McCourt said. "When it's a nice, dry, cool day like this, it's more pleasant for the flowers and more pleasant for everybody to participate."

The farm will skip its summer flower season this year, McCourt said, so staff can work on agricultural improvements to the clay-heavy soil that made drainage difficult last year.

The spring festival is expected to continue until the Victoria Day weekend, depending on bloom conditions, as town enforcement continues.

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Cleaning for the Queen

A little help goes a long way. Volunteers collect and sort through a pile of litter they cleaned up at Queen's Royal Park on Saturday, May 2, as part of the annual Love Your Lakes shoreline cleanup initiative. This effort is part of more than 300 cleanups taking place across south Ontario. ANDREW HAWLITZKY

Developer withdraws court appeal of tribunal's decision on Rand Estate

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

Solmar Development Corp. wanted a judicial review of the Ontario Land Tribunal's decision to reject its development proposal for the Rand Estate. FILE/PAIGE SEBURN

A prominent developer was expected to take the matter of its rejected plan for a development on a historic property in Niagara-on-the-Lake to the highest court in Ontario last month — however, the advocacy group involved in the case is sharing that the developer has withdrawn its appeal.

Save Our Rand Estate says that Solmar (Niagara 2) Inc., which failed to get approval for its plans for a 172-unit subdivision on the historic Rand Estate in Old Town, withdrew its appeal to the Ontairo Court of Appeal asking it to review the fairness and legality of the Ontario Land Tribunal's decision on the matter (without relitigating the decision itself).

In October 2024, following a months-long hearing that pit Solmar against the Town of NOTL, the advocacy group, known as SORE, and Rand Estate neighbours Blair and Brenda McArthur, the Ontario Land Tribunal ruled that Solmar needs to re-evaluate its development plans, as they "do not represent good planning in the public interest."

In response, Solmar, owned by developer Benny Marotta, filed an appeal asking the tribunal to review its decision, arguing it made key errors in its ruling — in January 2025, the tribunal chair decided that the request for review was unwarranted and the appeal was ultimately dismissed a few months later in April.

At the same time as it filed its appeal with the tribunal, however, Solmar requested a judicial review from the Court of Appeal to have it look over aspects of the tribunal's decision-making and rule on whether or not it acted reasonably.

Everyone involved would've had to wait until April 1 for the first hearing — however, with Solmar withdrawing its appeal, no hearing will be taking place.

"This is just the latest of several instances over the last nine years where Mr. Marotta appealed a tribunal or court decision on Rand he doesn't like only to withdraw his appeal on the doorstep of the hearing," said SORE's online statement from May 1.

SORE said Solmar paid for the privilege of withdrawing its appeal. It did not confirm how much Solmar paid.

"We understand that Mr. Marotta will be coming back with yet another proposal for development at the Rand Estate," the group added in its statement.

"We would like to think after withdrawing his appeal of the (tribunal) decision that he has finally agreed to stop fighting and come to the table with a proposal that accepts the major constraints that the (tribunal) has put on this important heritage property. We are not holding our breath."

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Province says official plan cannot be approved as is, town must keep secondary plans separate

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A warning from the province is forcing Niagara-on-the-Lake to rework its long-awaited official plan, with key policies at risk if it's approved as is.

Just a few days after council approved a final draft and was prepared to seek the provincial stamp of approval, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing told town staff April 17 it would remove the town's four secondary plans, covering Glendale, St. Davids, Queenston and the dock area, when the plan is submitted for approval.

Staff said the province's direction aligns with proposed changes under Bill 98, introduced in March, which would separate secondary plans from official plans.

In late October, the province flagged that secondary plans integrated into the town's official plan must align with current provincial policies, but told staff in April it would remove them from the document if it's approved as-is.

As a result, council pulled the official plan from its scheduled April 28 approval and will now consider a revised version on May 26.

The secondary plans will be removed from the final draft and kept in the town's current 2017 plan, meaning, effectively, two official plans will be in force.

"We would be without policy direction in some of those key areas of our town," said Aimee Alderman, the town's director of planning, building and development services, explaining why staff are recommending the shift.

At the same time, council wrestled with how firm it should be on wineries, debating whether to bring back a stricter rule from the town's unapproved 2019 plan requiring 75 per cent of winery land be planted in grapes, or keep the more flexible wording of the "majority" of winery land from 2017.

Council kept the more flexible wording, but not before much discussion over how best to protect farmland while supporting the local wine industry.

"I think we're setting them up to fail," Coun. Erwin Wiens said, warning some wineries would struggle to meet the requirement of 75 per cent.

Others argued a firm rule is needed to protect agricultural land.

"This is a land use issue, so I am in favour of keeping the 75 per cent," Coun. Sandra O'Connor said. "Generally 75 per cent."

O'Connor said the word "generally" would offer "a tool for staff" to have flexibility when needed.

Council did not move forward with the proposed 75 per cent requirement, with or without the added flexibility of the word "generally," instead keeping the more flexible wording and agreeing to revisit the issue later as part of a broader review of on-farm diversified uses, which will look at how farms and wineries operate and what should be allowed on agricultural land.

Wiens warned setting a firm rule without that data could raise questions.

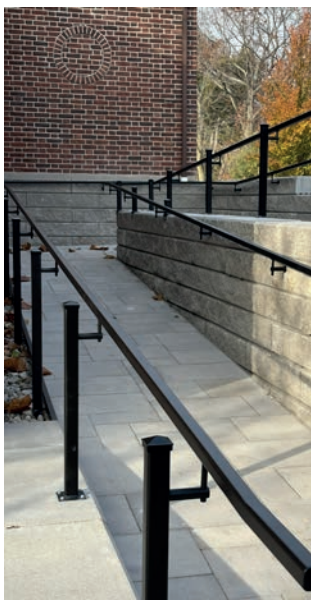
Council also backed changes requested by the wine industry, replacing an earlier requirement that all wine be made from locally grown fruit with a more flexible "majority" requirement.

"It allows for a bit more flexibility," Alderman said.

paigeseburn@niagaranow.com

RiverBrink Art Museum gets accessibility upgrades thanks to $92K grant

Staff
The Lake Report



RiverBrink's newly installed accessibility ramp.

Niagara-on-the-Lake's RiverBrink Art Museum got a $92,800 boost from the provincial government this spring, and used the money to make improvements to the accessibility of the building in Queenston.

The art museum's installed a new accessible ramp on one side of the building, updated its exterior stairs on another side and added handrails to the stairs.

These upgrades allow "visitors of all abilities, including those with mobility challenges" to "safely and comfortable experience exhibitions and programs" at RiverBrink, stated a May 1 media release.

"We are grateful to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for its generous support," said director and curator Debra Antoncic.

"These upgrades are an important step toward ensuring that RiverBrink is welcoming and accessible to everyone."

To learn about current and upcoming exhibitions at RiverBrink Art Museum, visit riverbrink.org.

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59th annual Virgil Stampede returns this May long weekend

Staff
The Lake Report

Expect a long weekend full of carnival rides and games, classic fair food, kid-friendly events and a fireworks show on Victoria Day. FILE/DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Niagara-on-the-Lake's vibrant summer season is just around the corner, and the community of Virgil is readying to welcome it in with the 59th-annual Virgil Stampede this upcoming May long weekend.

Thousands are expected to come out to the Virgil Sports Park from Sunday, May 16 to Monday, May 18 for a weekend of carnival rides, games, family-friendly events, classic fair food and, on Monday evening, a fireworks show to celebrate Victoria Day.

The grounds at 1565 Four Mile Creek Rd. will be open on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., Sunday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Monday from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

"Everything's in place," said Marcia Penner, the lead organizer of this year's Stampede. "We've had a pretty rainy spring so far, so we're hoping that stays away. But everything is in place and we're anticipating a great turnout and a great show."

Entry tickets are $5 per person and admission is free for those 10 and under. Early-bird ride bracelets, valid for a single day, are $35 plus tax until Friday, May 15. Then, they'll only be available on the grounds of the Stampede on Saturday, where they'll be $45 plus tax. They can be bought at Phil's Independent at 1551 Niagara Stone Rd., or online.

Alongside carnival rides and games, food and the Victoria Day fireworks, the Stampede will also host free pony rides, a skatepark and the kids' pavillion with a reptile show, face painting, comedy acts and more.

Organizers have heightened the security and police presence at the Stampede over the years — security will be checking bags as guests enter the fairgrounds. Backpacks are not allowed into the park. There's also no smoking, vaping or alcohol permitted on Stampede grounds.

"We don't take any chances and it's our mission to make sure that all of our patrons are safe and that's what we intend to do," Penner said.

Introduced last year and returning this year is a free parking shuttle service, running only on Monday, to help those driving to the Stampede.

The shuttle will take people from Niagara United Mennonite Church at 1775 Niagara Stone Rd. to Gate 2 Lorraine Street and back.

From Lorraine Street, people can walk to get into the grounds. The road at Lorraine Street and Arena Road is closed to vehicles.

The shuttle will run from noon to 11 p.m., with a second shuttle vehicle to be added at 9 p.m. Pickup will be every 20 minutes.

There is no parking available on the Stampede grounds, except for accessible parking. Two parking lots will be open the whole weekend for Stampede attendees in the area: The NOTL Town Hall at 1593 Four Mile Creek Rd. and Cornerstone Community Church at 1570 Niagara Stone Rd.

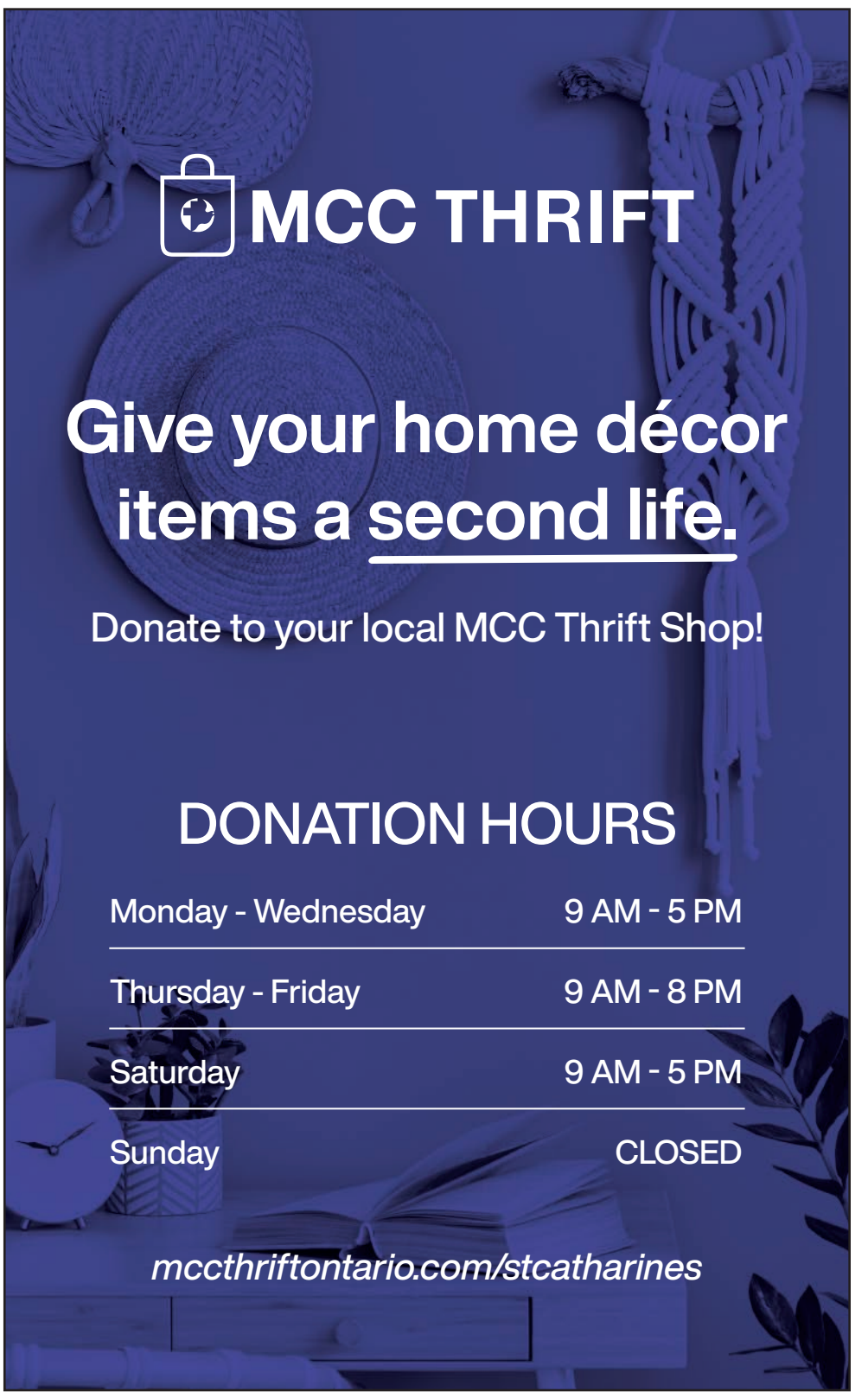
A third lot, at Meridian Credit Union (1567 Niagara Stone Rd.), will be open Sunday and Monday.

The Virgil Business Association, which organizes and runs the annual event, will be donating proceeds this year to Radiant Care's Pleasant Manor Retirement Village, the Red Roof Retreat and, new this year, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum, in support of its ongoing building expansion.

"This is what we do. We support community and we're excited to help them along," said Penner.

The business association hosts and funds the Stampede every year and has financially supported several sports and recreation facilities in the village over the years.

To buy early-bird ride tickets from now until May 16, visit virgilstampede.ca.



From boundary backlash to fresh start at Crossroads

Students moving to Virgil school from St. Davids Public School get chance to meet future peers

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Top: Crossroads principal Kate Fish welcomes St. Davids students during Wednesday's transition visit, walking them through the day's plan before students received Crossroads bags filled with spirit wear and snacks. Bottom: Fish and Susan Plat, vice-principal at Crossroads and St. Davids, stand together as both schools work together to make September's boundary change feel less overwhelming for students and families. PAIGE SEBURN

The hugs started before the visit did.

Months after a controversial school boundary change left some Niagara-on-the-Lake families angry, anxious and unsure about what came next, students from St. Davids Public School walked into Crossroads Public School on Wednesday to meet the classmates, teachers and school community waiting for them in September.

For the students making the move, it was their latest step into a change they never asked for.

For Crossroads staff, including principal Kate Fish, it was another chance to make sure they did not feel like strangers.

"We have it all split up into the classes that you are going into," Fish told students as they arrived. "Kids who are already in the class are going to help you."

The visit was part of a months-long transition process for students affected by the District School Board of Niagara's decision to move about 125 students from Niagara-on-the-Green out of the St. Davids catchment and into Crossroads starting this fall.

The board has said the change was driven by overcrowding and traffic issues at St. Davids.

But the decision drew backlash from parents who said they felt blindsided, shut out of the process and worried about what the move would mean for their children's friendships, routines and sense of belonging.

Now, while the disappointment has not disappeared, some parents say work being done behind the scenes has helped soften the landing.

Sonal Ahluwalia, whose daughter Adina is in Grade 5 at St. Davids and will attend Crossroads for Grade 6 in September, said the past few months have made a difference.

"And honestly, that helped my daughter a lot," Ahluwalia said. "She has been much more relaxed now compared to her initial anxiety."

Ahluwalia said parents were invited to Crossroads for an open house and school tour on Feb. 5, followed by a planning meeting on March 10 where families were asked what would help make the transition easier for their children.

That mattered, she said.

"One thing that I feel very good and grateful about is that the staff and principal at Crossroads didn't just tell us what to do, they actually asked us what would help us feel comfortable."

"I think that made a huge difference in feeling the way we feel as parents, for our kids who were anxious and nervous over this change," she said.

Ahluwalia said the "main common concern" among parents was "friendship and building new connections," especially for students in older grades.

"I think this school trip is to especially ensure they all get to meet their new future classmates," she said.

Fish said both schools have tried to respond to that concern directly.

"We will make sure that all of the kids will have somebody from St David's in their class," she said, regarding St. Davids students affected by the move.

"They're going to be given the opportunity at the end of the school year to request who they want in their class, we've expressed this to the parents too."

Fish said the student groups used during Wednesday's visit were not final class lists.

She said the goal of the visit was to help students see Crossroads not as an unknown place, but as a school where they already belong.

"We're hoping that they meet some people today," she said.

"They can also have the opportunity to select some of the kids who are in their classes today, that they meet today, to be in the class next year."

Students took part in community-building activities with children in the grades they will enter in September, including a "community circle" where they could introduce themselves and share information at their own comfort level.

"Starting with building that community," Fish said.

They also worked on a paw print activity tied to the school's coyote mascot, drawing themselves in the centre and adding parts of their identity around the outside, including hobbies, talents, dreams and things that bring them joy.

The activity was meant to help students find common ground with future classmates.

"They have to find three people who have the same hobbies," Fish said.

Students also received a Crossroads bag with a spirit wear T-shirt and snack inside and had time for recess together.

"We really wanted them to have an opportunity to have recess together so that they can play free," Fish said.

Grade 1 students from St. Davids and Crossroads have also been writing back and forth as pen pals before meeting in person.

Last week, they had "pen pal day" and "did some fun activities together," said Fish.

She said the two school communities are already closely connected, with students from both often playing on the same sports teams in Virgil.

"So everybody knows, sort of everybody," she said.

Administrative staff at both schools are also in regular contact.

"We're really closely connected," she said. "We talk all the time."

School board superintendent Mat Miller attended the visit.

In a statement, he said both school teams deserve credit for the work behind the transition.

"I want to recognize the incredible work of both school teams," he said.

"Principal (Carl) Glauser, vice-principal (Susan) Plat and the St. Davids staff have done an excellent job of collaborating with principal Fish and Crossroad staff to make the transition process a very positive, engaging and student-focused experience," Miller said.

For Fish, the strongest sign of progress has come from the students themselves.

"It's been a lengthy but really powerful process to see how excited kids can get when you create a positive environment for them to come into," she said.

"Did you see the (St. Davids) kids when they were coming in?" she said. "I've seen them so many times, like they're hugging me."

"You can see that the kids here are very excited about it," she added.

Ahluwalia said her disappointment with the boundary change "remains in place still, sadly."

But as September gets closer, she said the transition efforts have helped her daughter feel more ready for what comes next.

"So far, they seem very welcoming and I hope things go smoothly for the kids."

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Planning priorities about 'getting stuff across the finish line'

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

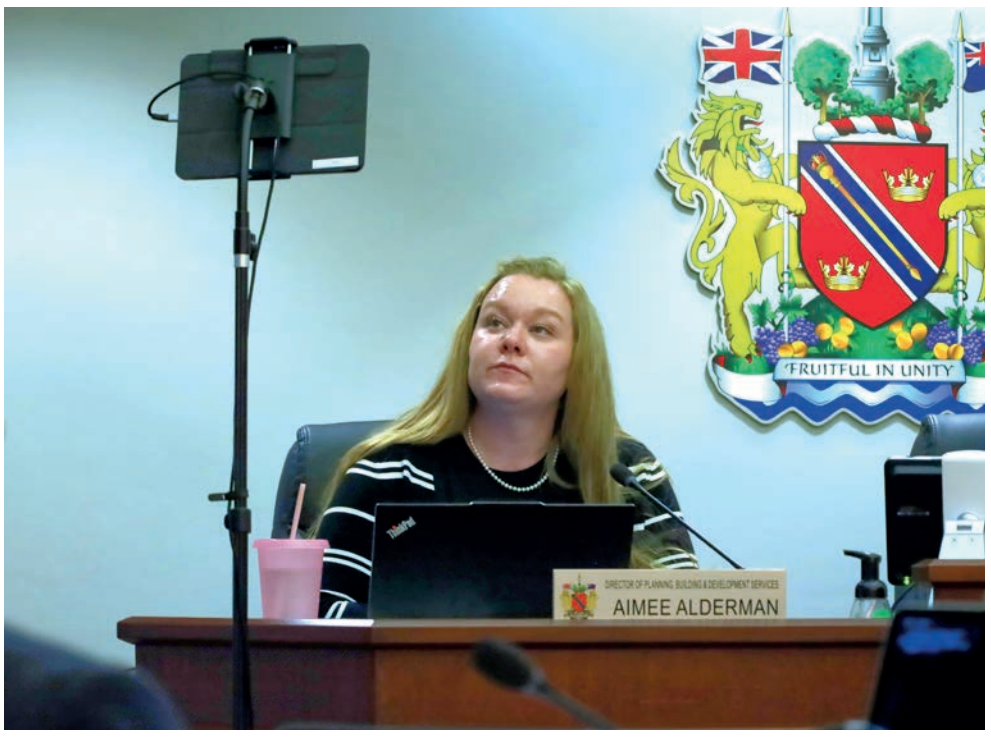
Niagara-on-the-Lake councillors spent roughly an hour Tuesday arguing over a simple question with big consequences for the town: what planning work should staff focus on in 2026?

The debate unfolded as council reviewed a proposed planning work plan organizing 34 active projects into three tiers based on urgency, council direction and community impact.

Staff said the recommended priorities, tied to housing, agriculture, heritage, urban design and development, reflect what the department can realistically handle this year without requiring more funding or stretching staff too thin.

At the centre of the disagreement was whether council should reshuffle staff's proposed priorities.

"What is being recommended this evening is that staff advance the work for those eight or nine items that are listed in the report — only — for 2026," said Aimee Alderman, the town's director of planning, building and development services.



Aimee Alderman, the town's director of planning, building and development services, warns veering from the set course of priorities could cost time and money. PAIGE SEBURN

That list includes eight items: Tier 1 projects like the housing needs assessment, Queen Street secondary plan, on-farm diversified use review and ordnance boundary stone restoration, Tier 2 projects including the urban design review panel, heritage designation work and site plan guidelines, and one Tier 3 project, an update to the town's additional residential unit guide.

Alderman said all recommended projects are expected to be completed in 2026 except the housing assessment, Queen Street plan and on-farm review, which would begin this year but likely continue beyond it.

During the discussion, Coun. Maria Mavridis questioned whether councillors were treating the town's three planning tiers as a ranking system rather than organizational categories.

Alderman said all projects on the list are considered important and the tier system was mainly created to help staff organize the town's growing workload.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor argued council should use the meeting to rethink the order of those priorities.

"This is the only opportunity we have to do this."

O'Connor said she was frustrated that staff presented council with a recommended list of priorities while advising against changes to it, arguing councillors should have had more say in setting the town's planning agenda for 2026.

"To me, this is not consultation," she said.

Most councillors rejected that argument, saying council already had opportunities to shape priorities through earlier strategic planning discussions and work plan meetings with staff.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa said councillors were invited in February to review departmental work plans, while Mavridis said staff had specifically asked council members to meet and discuss workloads and priorities.

"These are all the things that we've talked about over the course of the last four years," Coun. Tim Balasiuk said about the listed priorities.

Coun. Erwin Wiens warned against changing direction midway through ongoing projects.

"This is about getting stuff across the finish line," he said.

O'Connor also proposed moving the Chautauqua neighbourhood review, the community planning permit system and the heritage priority designation list into the town's top tier of priorities, while lowering airport growth planning and the housing needs assessment.

The airport incentives and growth management project was not one of the eight recommended priority projects for 2026, but was listed under Tier 2 in the broader planning matrix.

She also questioned why the stone restoration was treated as a higher priority, calling it "rather minor."

Alderman repeatedly warned that rearranging or adding projects could mean revisiting staff availability and costs.

O'Connor's amendment ultimately failed in a vote, leading council to approve the original 2026 planning priorities list as is.

paigeseburn@niagaranow.com

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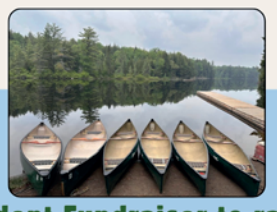
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What was Fort Mississauga built for?

Tony Chisholm
Special to The Lake Report

Built in 1814 in part by the Coloured Corps, Fort Mississauga stands today as the only remaining example of a square tower within a star-shaped earthwork left in the country. Tours of the site will open May 16. SUPPLIED

The site of Fort Mississauga, also known as Mississauga Point, was an important fishing ground, was the site of the first lighthouse on the Great Lakes, was part of the Battle of Fort George, and became an important military fortification called Fort Mississauga. Construction of Fort Mississauga began in the spring of 1814 and was built in part by the Coloured Corps who had been attached to the Royal Engineers in late 1813.

The Coloured or Black Corps was raised at the outbreak of war, in the defense of Upper Canada. It was made up of freed and enslaved Black men. They were active in the British defense at the Battle of Queenston Heights and fought alongside their British counterparts at the Battle of Fort George in May 1813.

In the spring of 1814, the company was ordered to construct a new fort on the Canadian shore, dubbed Fort Mississauga. With the American navy now controlling Lake Ontario this work was crucial to the security of British forces in the Niagara Peninsula. The Coloured Corps continued working with the Royal Engineers until 1815, when they were disbanded.

Today, Fort Mississauga stands on the shores of the Niagara River, highlighting the early military history of Niagara. It is the only remaining example of a square tower within a star-shaped earthwork left in Canada.

And now, Fort Mississauga National Historic Site will be open on weekends from May 16 to June 28, from 10 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. each Saturday and Sunday. Join Friends of Fort George staff on-site and explore this historic gem with us.

Our interpreters will be on-site within the grounds of Fort Mississauga with replica artifacts, children's activities and a small gift shop display. Join us and learn about the history of the site, access the interior of the tower, and take part in our historic tours.

Our in-depth tours will take place at 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m., each day, and will include a visit to the Sally Port with our staff.

Visiting the site is free of charge, but accessing the interior of the site, or going on a tour costs $5/person.

We hope you will take advantage of this unique opportunity to explore Niagara's early history.

For more information, contact the Friends of Fort George at 905-468-6621 or email admin@friendsoffortgeorge.ca. All proceeds from this initiative will help to support student employment opportunities at Fort George and Brock's Monument.

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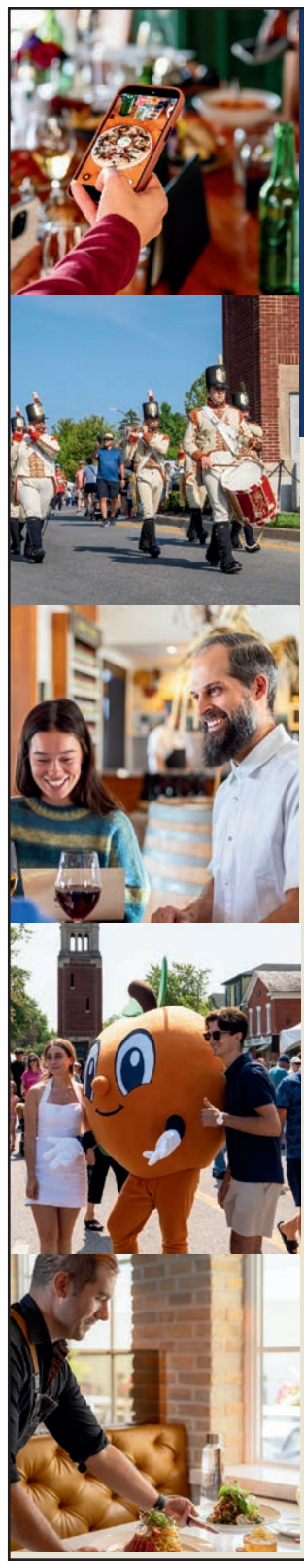
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Members of the NOTL Golf Club's nine- and 18-hole women's leagues kicked off the 2026 season Tuesday. DARREN SMITH

Players spring into action at NOTL Golf Club

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

Despite the rain, cold and inconsistent weather, spring has sprung — and golfers are hitting the links at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club.

One sure sign of seasonal renewal is the club's nine- and 18-hole women's leagues hosting their annual opening scramble to kick things off.

They were out in force on Tuesday to play, enjoy lunch and socialize.

Women's club champion Louise Robitaille, along with Judy Cardiff and Shelley Sansom, shot even-par 36 to win the team event.

One shot behind at 1-over 37 was the threesome of Judy Mantle, Cathy Saytar and Sue Sherk. Six other groups finished tied at 2-over 38.

Linda Williams and Yolanda Henry sank the longest putts on #8, while Lyn Sanders and Robitaille had the longest drives on hole #2.

The Monday business women's league has also resumed play and this week Tracey Peters was the low-gross winner with 46.

Jen Kroeker had the longest drive on #1, Linda Anderson-Kozik was closest to the 150 marker on #2 and Bobbie Corcoran won closest to the pin on #4.

Gail Skenes drained the longest putt on #7 and Isobel Sipos was closest to the pin on #9.

Meanwhile, the men resumed play in the Tuesday Woofs league, hosting their own opening scramble.

Glenn Murray, Jack Hanna and Jason Crowley were top dogs, putting it all together to shoot 5-under 31.

Right behind them at 32 were Mike Mott, Nic Pollice and Stephen Fraser.

Third place was decided through the mysterious magic of retrogression.

The foursome of Harry Huizer, Barry Day, Hugh Hutton and Gord Horne edged out Alan Robb, Bill Smethurst and Stein Hensen. Both groups shot 33.

Smethurst also grabbed the closest to the pin prize with his tee shot (and birdie) on #4.

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The Lake Report

OPINION

TLR

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Contributed by Patty Garriock

"The world's favorite season is the spring.
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- Edwin Way Teale.

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Editorial

Zalepa may run again. Or not. Whatever, it isn't important

Richard Harley
Editor-in-Chief

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa has refused to listen to residents, has been condescending to colleagues and residents on several occasions and isn't sure if he's going to run again. He found his part-time commitment consuming.

Hey y'all — it's the most wonderful time of the year: election season.

Nominations are now open for the 2026 municipal election and in Niagara-on-the-Lake the stakes feel higher than ever.

Over the past four years, residents have watched council drift further away from the people it was elected to represent. We've seen growing deference to developers, growing hostility toward criticism and a growing tendency to treat resident concerns as obstacles instead of guidance.

Before he was even elected in 2022, Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa promised "part-time" involvement in the town's affairs.

He delivered on that promise.

Under his leadership, we now have a gaping hole where Parliament Oak once stood, a deeply divisive roundabout project many residents opposed, a council chamber overflowing with frustration and an increasing sense among residents that their voices simply no longer matter.

This administration has become defined by detachment.

Questions from the media are ignored when they are inconvenient. Residents who disagree are dismissed as nuisances. Experts hired by the town are treated as unquestionable authorities, while residents with decades of lived experience in this community are brushed aside like they are ignorant.

And now, with nominations open, Zalepa has taken to social media to say he is "seriously weighing" whether to seek another term.

Translation: maybe, maybe not.

For someone supposedly leading this town, it was a remarkably uninspired message. Detached. Casual. Almost bored.

Which is strange, because he never seems too busy for photo opportunities.

Smile cookies? There's time.

Community optics? Always time.

But when it comes to accountability, difficult conversations or major public concerns, residents are repeatedly reminded he has a "real job."

If that sounds unfair, ask why he did not attend the packed public presentation by the Jim Burton foundation regarding the future vision for the old hospital lands — one of the most significant conversations currently happening in this community.

The absence spoke volumes.

Because increasingly, many residents feel this administration's decisions are made long before public consultation begins.

Residents are allowed to speak, certainly. They're just not allowed to matter.

That attitude has defined this council term.

This is a mayor who once told a resident unhappy with the direction of the town to run for mayor themselves.

Notably, he did not say residents should support him.

Then there is the strange self-congratulation contained in his latest message.

He speaks of a "reset" at town hall. Reset into what, exactly? Into the most divisive and toxic council atmosphere many longtime observers can remember?

Into a council culture where dissent is mocked and councillors who challenge the dominant narrative are openly belittled?

Coun. Sandra O'Connor in particular has repeatedly faced dismissive and condescending treatment during meetings simply for asking difficult questions.

Zalepa also boasts about resolving lawsuits the town allegedly had weak positions on. Yet residents were often shown only one side of those disputes through selectively released documents, while crucial context and defence arguments remained absent from public view.

In one settlement case, the town had already won the initial ruling, but caved when that was appealed by a developer.

That context mattered.

Then there's stormwater infrastructure — an issue residents spent years warning about while flooding worsened across parts of town. Concerns were repeatedly minimized until investigative reporting by The Lake Report forced the scale of the issue into public focus.

Now, suddenly, fixing stormwater is a priority.

Interesting timing.

Throughout this term, Zalepa has often appeared less interested in listening than in controlling the narrative. Residents, councillors and media alike have experienced unnecessary hostility and dismissiveness from an administration that increasingly behaves as though criticism itself is the problem.

Meanwhile, behind closed doors, politically engaged residents have reportedly been mocked and labelled the "horrible hundred."

Think about that for a moment.

People who attend meetings, ask questions, write letters and care deeply about the future of their town are reduced to a sneering nickname.

And when leaders begin viewing engaged residents as enemies, meaningful consultation becomes impossible.

That is not leadership.

Leadership requires humility. It requires listening. It requires respect — especially toward people who disagree with you.

Most importantly, leadership requires full commitment to the role.

Niagara-on-the-Lake deserves a mayor fully invested in protecting this community, preserving its character and respecting the people who live here.

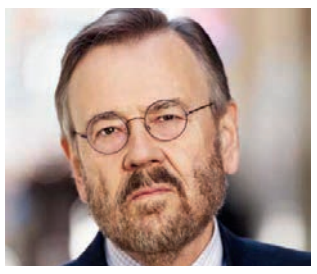
After four years of division, dismissiveness and part-time leadership, many residents are ready for someone else to try.

Zalepa should make this easy on everyone and step aside.

Niagara-on-the-Lake deserves better

editor@niagaranow.com

NOTL vs. the machine



THE TURNER REPORT

Garth Turner
Columnist

This election is the big one, say NOTL resident activists Stuart McCormack (left) and Ron Simkus, after the province has shackled local democracy. GARTH TURNER

"In Niagara-on-the-Lake, old ghosts walk beneath a tree that grew before Columbus, through streets armies fought for in 1812. But they're being routed by modern subdivisions — and we're losing a precious shrine."

It was August 1956 when Maclean's magazine wrote those words in a feature on "The town that wants to stay old-fashioned."

In the story, Lord Mayor William Greaves said, "We need a miracle. Or we'll just become a suburb of St. Catharines."

Seventy years later, we're still standing. Still old. Still under pressure. Still proudly not-St-Catharines. And maybe seeking the biggest miracle yet.

It's no secret the province would like NOTL to be a part of its Las Vegas North regional strategy. You know, like Niagara Falls but with our clothes still on. Wine, theatre, shopping, wine, gelato plus cute heritage. And did I mention the wine?

To that end, the Doug Ford administration is poised to shred local democracy in a way that makes this year's election a corker.

"I know people tell you every time that this is a pivotal election," says Stuart McCormack, "but this time it really is. I don't think many have any real idea of what's about to happen."

Here's the scoop.

It's called Bill 100. It will soon become law. When that happens, NOTL will lose its rep on the regional council, which will be chopped in half and comprised of just area mayors. So, less democracy.

Worse, that council will be headed and controlled by an appointed chair that nobody elects. Yes, less democracy. Worse, the chair has super powers, and so local laws can be altered, delayed or trashed. No democracy.

"We're concerned about the state of democracy in Ontario," says Ron Simkus, who with McCormack helped found the renegade NOTL Residents Association.

"With these changes, are people going to say it just doesn't matter how they vote anymore, because they end up with basically no voice? This is an environment that is completely new for most people. They have no idea how much they're going to be impacted by one appointed person at the region."

"The appointed chair can actually overturn a municipal bylaw. You think you live in a heritage district, and all of a sudden, you don't. Well, how did that happen, right? One guy can decide there should be duplexes in the Old Town and suddenly it happens."

Or a casino in the Parliament Oak hotel, for that matter. Yikes.

All this makes choosing the next lord mayor a high-stakes gamble. That person must not only rule a disparate, complex town — from the condo towers of Glendale to the horse droppings on Queen Street — but be the sole voice at the senior level where big tax, policy and service decisions are made.

It's not for the faint of heart, the meek, or a part-timer (like our current czar).

"So this becomes a very key figure doesn't it?" says McCormack. "Also, it means whoever is going to do this job cannot do it on a part-time basis. If you're spending a considerable amount of time working on local issues and at the same time trying to address things at the regional level, I don't know how you can do it half-time. You've got to be somebody willing to put in a considerable amount of effort and treat it like it's a full-time job, which it is."

Indeed. And it would be even better to have a boss free of conflicts of interest. The incumbent, Gary Zalepa, is a career real estate broker and executive, which critics see as one reason the burg is turning into a giant construction site.

So far, two candidates have stepped up.

Last week I told you about Vaughn Goettler. On deck is Andrea Kaiser.

Meanwhile, the citizens are trying to figure out where that miracle is.

"We are not the opposition," says Simkus. "We are the alternative. We're trying as best we possibly can. We're trying to mobilize people, to get them taking action. Do you not think we feel the pressure already?"

Garth Turner is a NOTL resident, journalist, author, wealth manager and former federal MP and minister.

garth@garth.ca

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RIDDLE ME THIS

This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style
Category: DOCTORED TELEVISION

Pop music idol Rick Springfield played Dr. Noah Drake on this medical drama that has aired more than 15,000 episodes.

Last issue category: WINEMAKER'S GLOSSARY

Clue: From Latin for "heavy," this 4-letter word refers to a style of dry champagne.

Answer: What is brut?

Answered first by: Sue Rautenberg

Also answered correctly (in order) by:
Bob Wheatley, Susan Hamilton, Larry Mantle, Lynda Collet, Emma Balsas, Jane Andersen, Becky Creager, Donna Taylor, Hugh Lundy, Nick D'Amore, Howard Jones, Margaret Garaughty, Jeff Lake, Tuija Johansson, Nancy Rocca, Jim Dandy, Wade Durling, Varadinek Pavel, Ted Wiens, Mike Gander, Chris Van de Laar, Sheila Meloche, Catherine Clarke, Margie Enns, Marla Percy,

Email answers to editor@niagaranow.com, with your name, for a chance to win a $25 Irish Harp Pub gift card every week. (Subject line: Riddle me this)

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OPINION

In Canada and the U.S., a leader's character is key

Keith McNenly
Special to The Lake Report

Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan coined this adage, "The medium is the message," to explain how the form of communication shapes meaning — from television to today's social media and AI. Politics works the same way.

A national leader broadcasts the country's values, its temperament and its intentions. In that sense, the leader is both medium and message.

Current American governance is an extreme example. Many Americans, by electing the current president (and Congress) — or by withholding support from alternatives — used that signal as protest: frustration with institutions, impatience with a poor economy, a willingness to "throw a monkey wrench" into a system they believed no longer served them.

Whatever the motives, the effect has been to elevate a style of rule marked by impulse and grievance, thin on empathy, short of foresight and a steady erosion of democratic restraint.

This brings a basic truth into focus: in national leadership, character is not a side issue. It is the foundation. Most of what a government does is implemented by professionals across departments and agencies.

Policy detail can be learned, competent advisers can be hired, but character cannot be outsourced. A leader's moral standards determine which instructions are given, which norms are respected, which institutions are treated as obstacles.

Good people usually cannot work in organizations where their moral standards are consistently challenged for long. Too many compromises accumulate; the job becomes a daily exercise in rationalizing corruption.

Political leaders of bad character understand this. They don't merely prefer loyal subordinates; they require them. Corruption becomes self-protecting: a dishonest leader must appoint dishonest underlings, and dishonest underlings select more of the same.

Over time, the rot spreads from cabinet tables to senior departments, until public work is less about duty and competence and more about loyalty tests, grift and fear.

The head of state exemplifies their country's values, temperament and intentions. For Canada, Prime Minister Mark Carney sets an example of stability and legality, particularly in comparison to the leader of the country south of the border, writes Keith McNenly. WIKIMEDIA

That is why electing a leader who places public interest subordinate to personal ambition is never only about one person. It is a decision about the ethical ecosystem of an entire government.

Once bad faith is seated at the top, the spiral can accelerate quickly. Some countries live that condition — long enough for corruption to feel normal and for cynicism to replace citizenship.

Frustration with government is not illegitimate. Democracies can fail ordinary people: wages lag, housing becomes unreachable, services degrade and elites appear insulated from consequences.

But frustration can be used constructively only if the electorate retains a basic civic discipline: demand change but preserve the foundation first — elect integrity — reward truth.

The contrast between the United States and Canada can be framed as two messages. The first from Americans a year and a half ago, upsetting both domestic and the global order, the second from Canada six months later in swift reaction.

America's electors produced a politics of disruption and grievance; Canada elected Mark Carney, representing order and stability — two sharply different broadcasts.

Our divergence in political style has deep roots. The United States and Canada were one British colony until 1776, when the American Revolution split the continent. Loyalists, aligned with Britain, largely fled north; revolutionaries built the American "experiment."

Historians often describe loyalists as valuing order, stability and legality, while revolutionaries saw Britain as a corrupt tyranny that denied them representation. Those origin stories helped shape two democratic cultures: different instincts about institutions, and different tolerances for disruption.

National elections send a message from citizens to the world. The message is not only policy; it is posture, it is what allies can expect, what adversaries can exploit and what norms will survive the next stress test. Citizens choose the leader — the message.

There is a bitter irony as the United States celebrates its 250th anniversary: the framers anticipated authoritarian leaders, but not modern concentrations of wealth and influence capable of pressuring — or purchasing — the very counterweights meant to hold power in check.

Authoritarian forces are aligning across borders, and the free world again needs coherent leadership. Canada's message, in that context, has been clarity of purpose.

Carney speaks plainly about stronger partnerships among mid-sized democracies — the message at home: defend sovereignty, strengthen the domestic economy and build capacity — lowering internal trade barriers, investing in infrastructure and taking security more seriously.

McLuhan's insight remains: the leader is the message. Carney is a message from Canadians that stability and legality are a greater national strength than disruption and grievance.

Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Keith McNenly was the chief administrator of the Town of Mono for 41 years.

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Niagara-on-the-Lake's potential parking money pit

David Israelson
Special to The Lake Report

David Israelson says building a parking garage in a seasonal town on prime space is a loss waiting to happen.

Supporters of turning Niagara-on-the-Lake's taxpayer-owned gateway property at 176 Wellington St. into a parking garage — and this includes the current council — seem to be operating under the illusion that parking would be a money earner for Canada's most beautiful town. They may be wrong.

NOTL is "in the parking business," Coun. Maria Mavridis said. But the actual numbers suggest that it's a bad business. A parking palace at 176 may become NOTL's next money pit.

Council has already started digging itself into a hole over this parking pickle. In March, the town voted 6-3 to direct its staff to spend up to $200,000 to design a parking garage with some bathrooms and a few extra rooms at the front.

They rejected a proposal that would have invited other ideas to be pitched, such as the James A. Burton Family Foundation's dream of turning the property into a hub for music, theatre, educational, tourism and Indigenous groups.

Council was told that an actual garage would cost between $9 million and $18 million to build — quite a gap, with little indication as to who would pay to build and maintain it.

The rationale is that somehow, historic NOTL is desperate for more paid parking spaces. The argument goes that a gateway garage would ease congestion in Old Town — you'd think it's Manhattan — and bring in vast revenues that could be applied directly to worthy projects in St. Davids, Virgil, Queenston and Glendale.

The actual numbers suggest otherwise.

It appears that the Niagara-on-the-Lake heritage district has 787 metered spaces, with rates between $5.25 and $5.75 per hour, enforced between 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

If each of those spaces were occupied and paid for every single day for every single hour where fees are charged, each space would generate more than $20,000, nearly $16 million per year for all of them together.

But they don't generate nearly that much. Niagara-on-the-Lake's 2024 Annual Report shows total parking revenue of $3,437,657. That's about $4,368 per space annually.

This suggests that the town's paid parking spaces are operating at less than 23 per cent of full capacity. At the paid parking that's already at 176 Wellington St., even fewer people are paying to dump their cars — spaces there are at about seven per cent of their money-making capacity.

So the town's idea so far is that we should spend $200,000 to design a parking garage that could cost taxpayers up to $18 million based on, what? A perceived need for more parking in a town where the existing paid spaces are unused at least three quarters of the time.

It's true that there are occasions when Old Town is jammed with cars — during the various fruit festivals, on Candlelight Stroll night in the fall and whenever there's a smash hit at the Shaw.

But easing congestion wasn't council's main rationale for leaning toward a garage at 176 Wellington — money is. Council members either believe or were led to believe that parking will bring in piles of it.

The numbers say it won't.

Even if it did, there's no assurance that even a penny of new revenues would go to badly needed projects such as a community centre/new pool in St. Davids or Glendale or adding more much-welcomed landscaping in Virgil.

Our council members either know the numbers for parking don't work, or they ought to know. And for those members who already understand, voters might ask:

Why are they so intent on turning one of the last pieces of community-owned property into a money-losing parking lot?

David Israelson is a writer and non-practising lawyer who lives in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

OPINION

Leave the trees on Mississagua Street alone

The following letter was sent to Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa and members of town council. A copy was forwarded to The Lake Report for publication.

As residents of Mississagua Stret, we welcome some of the proposed upgrades, such as burying utilities, and providing new street lights; however, we also have the following concerns:

Mississagua Street from Mary to Queen borders the historic neighbourhood, with St Andrew's church cemetery and some historic homes. It is flanked on both sides by tall, stately, old trees, which enhance and support the heritage aspect of the street.

Their presence sends a strong visual signal that Mississagua Street is an historic area. They help create an atmosphere loved by residents and visitors alike and provide much-needed shade during our hot summers; they house wildlife and enhance air quality.

It is shamefully ironic that 41 of these trees maybe sacrificed to allow more pavement — sidewalks and bike lanes — especially given the many efforts elsewhere in town to preserve NOTL's built and natural heritage.

Taking down so many trees at once on one specific street is absurdly inconsistent with the town's emphasis in preserving its historic ambience and further, is disrespectful, as if Mississagua Street is less important than other streets in the old town.

Obviously, trees that are in danger of falling must be removed for safety; otherwise, they should be left alone and the sidewalk/bike lanes, should be built around them.

At the open house event showcasing the proposal recently, the Town of NOTL representative, when asked, could not provide information as to the replacement of the trees: how many, when, what types etc.

Regardless, no matter what plan the town for replacing them, the immediate loss of 41 trees significantly and negatively impacts the street view overall, and further, it disrespects the history of Mississagua Street as an important entrance to/exit from the old town.

Karen Conderan and George Jager of Mississagua Street say the trees lining the street are an important piece of the entrance to town and should be protected. MEGAN VANDERLEE

Sidewalks and bike lanes: We do not need both.

One shared paved pathway could easily accommodate both bikes and pedestrians and reduce the need to take down trees. We have noted as Mississagua Street residents that even during peak tourist season, bike and pedestrian traffic is not sufficient to require both bike lanes and sidewalk.

Parking: Adding both sidewalks and bike lanes will effectively eliminate any possible street parking for residents, contractors, visitors and those attending community events like St. Andrew's Strawberry Festival or the NOTL Santa Claus parade.

Speed and safety: Mississagua Street, one of the main arteries into the old town area, is used daily by delivery trucks, construction vehicles, emergency vehicles and tour buses in addition to resident and visitor vehicles.

We have noted that many drivers use the long straight run along Mississauga Street from Mary to Queen to clip along at excessive speed, making a bike lane right next to traffic a dangerous proposition. This is another argument for having one shared bike path/walkway with a larger buffer zone between it and the road.

In addition, reduced speed limit and traffic-calming measures should be built into any future Mississagua Street improvements to make it safer for all.

In conclusion, too much focus is being placed on proposed infrastructure changes at the expense of the natural heritage and beauty of the treed streetscape.

It would better serve the community if a phased approach to the removal and replacement of trees were taken rather than a wholesale removal of all of the trees at once.

A multi-use path rather than two bike lanes and a sidewalk would make better and safer use of the limited space.

We trust that our interest in preserving the streetscape will assist you in taking better and more sustainable approach.

Karen Conderan and George Jager
Old Town

NIAGARA NORTH
Family Health Team

CALL FOR COMMUNITY BOARD MEMBERS

The Niagara North Family Health Team (NNFHT) seeks two community members for its Board of Directors who would represent St. Catharines and surrounding areas. The NNFHT is a not for profit, charitable corporation providing multidisciplinary health care services to nearly 40,000 patients in the communities of Niagara on the Lake and St. Catharines, Ontario.

Ideally, candidates will have a strong interest in advancing health care services to the citizens of St Catharines, Niagara-on-the-Lake and surrounding area as well as guiding the strategic direction of the organization. For these members, prior experience as a board member along with a background of work in the areas of 1. Financial management or accounting or 2. Risk management, performance measurement (key performance indicators) and organizational effectiveness would be preferred.

Further information on the NNFHT can be found on its web site (niagaranorthfht.ca). Please apply in writing by sending your resume no later than May 15, 2026 to: Stephen Szeplaki, Executive Director, Niagara North Family Health Team sszeplaki@niagaranorthfht.ca. Thank you for your interest in the NNFHT. Please note that we will not be contacting every applicant, only those who will be invited to the second stage of the selection process. This will be done no later than May 22, 2026.

Mayor Zalepa has nothing to brag about from past four years

Dear editor:

I understand from his recent Facebook post our lord mayor is still contemplating running for a second term in Niagara-on-the-Lake congratulating himself for the wonderful job he has done in the past four years; bragging about successfully reshaping the culture within council and the town's corporation.

If this new culture is the one in which he unilaterally signs a letter with the other mayors acceding to the wishes of Minister Rob Flack and Premier Doug Ford to restructure municipal governance in Niagara without even consulting our own town council, it is certainly no improvement to crow about — and the lame excuse of it was the working group's decision is simply misleading: Coun. Sandra O'Connor was on the working group and had no advance knowledge.

The culture you are so proud of includes much less citizen participation on committees and fewer public consultation bodies with a much expanded administrative staffing cost.

Furthermore, to continue and champion having settled and closed lawsuits drawing down the town's coffers because of the town's "weak" legal positioning is hogwash.

Gary Zalepa.

The Black 27 Prideaux settlement was simply a gift to the appellant of $225,000 on top of the profit they had made from the sale of the property. And the Hummel Properties settlement was just as unwarranted: paying-off a developer because he was presumably delayed in his plans to build across from the Old Winery, which, to this day, sits vacant with a "for sale" sign on it?

And then there is the matter of the major (upwards of 90 per cent) legal cost to the town of Mr. Marotta's companies and the Randwood estate since 2018.

But wait, every single action and appeal that Mr. Marotta and his companies have made has been either withdrawn or lost, including at Superior Court and the Ontario Land Tribunal, so I guess we were right as a town to defend our heritage and what is right for the town — and a least, in some circumstances, he has had to pay court costs.

If you decide to run again, my one wish for my fellow voters will be to remember who it was that approved the Parliament Oak hotel and then championed rebating almost $1 million in development fees to Mr. Marotta's company for his Parliament Oak dig both at town council and at regional council: it was you, Lord Mayor Zalepa, and your deputy lord mayor, leading the charge to give away our tax money.

Our taxes are up and our town's heritage and services are down under your watch — nothing to crow about, Mr. Zalepa.

Bob Bader
NOTL

How do the rules work for local wineries?

Dear editor:

Since I moved to NOTL four years ago and have acquired a taste for our local news and politics, I have been trying to follow the zoning issues with our various wineries.

It seems there is always some problem with some wineries breaching the bylaws and not being able to host outside events, or have restaurants, or have summer patios and yet other wineries have large outside venues: movie nights, concerts, weddings, Michelin-star restaurants, helicopters landing on site, skating rinks — the list goes on.

Megan Wood asks what distinguishes the town's large estate wineries from smaller operators in town.

All these wineries are all on agricultural land, are they not? Greenbelt lands? They all have neighbours — what is the difference? Why can some function, having large outdoor gatherings and others cannot? Why can some have full-service restaurants and others cannot?

Is it the zoning? Who approves the zoning? What is the criteria for the very different offerings the wineries can offer customers?

Stone Eagle Winery grew up out of the dust of agricultural land, with a large, concrete footprint, a full-service restaurant and opulent winery — who approved that and why is it different from a Konzelmann Winery or a Colaneri Winery or any other small, family-owned winery?

It seems to me, zoning should be respectful of our Greenbelt and preserve finite, agricultural/Greenbelt/growing soil. However, there should also be room for dining, music, weddings etc. — within certain guidelines — and all wineries should be held to the same standards and bylaw regulations.

Please tell us: what is the fundamental difference between the family-owned wineries and the corporate-owned wineries? Why does one group seem to get special treatment over the other?

It's a mystery to me — one I would appreciate a better understanding of.

Thank you.

Megan Wood
NOTL

Elderly would be deprived of perfect spot to live

Dear editor:

There is a lot of support for the generous offer of the Burton Family Foundation. We should accept it, but not at the location of the old hospital.

The centre of town, such as 176 Wellington St. and the area where an old age home used to be (now the property of the Shaw) should be returned to the previous purpose it was originally meant to be: to be an accessible area for longtime taxpayers of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

To once again deprive the longtime taxpayers, mostly elderly by now, of the perfect location for their homes in familiar surroundings, near to their longtime friends and relatives, is morally wrong. On the other hand, it is unthinkable to reject the plans of the Burton Foundation.

Let us hope that the Burton Foundation can be located to an area where their users and tourists can walk, park and get a free bus transport, or bike to the centre of town, our wineries and the other attractions that the town wants to advertise.

As for the school for the little ones, they can remain at 176 Wellington St., next to the home for the aged, and I think it will be a good fit for them to be in the same area.

Cecilia Bennett
NOTL

The Lake Report

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OPINION

In the past, life for children was simpler, but also stricter

ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson
Columnist

Yes, it was only a few decades ago that most parenting decisions were made by parents. Today, we seem to involve several levels of government, Moms and Dads, and people in between.

One recent headline screamed, "Social media ban for kids is bad policy." Most of us agree that young and not-so-young people stare at their hand-held devices too much each day. Even my very with-it Gen Z daughter Carrie thinks that in principle, Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew and the federal government of Australia are correct in banning social media and AI chatbots for kids 16 and under.

But the devil is in the details. How would this dynamically game-changing policy be rolled out and then enforced? Prove you qualify, and obey the rules.

Please permit to ramble off on a tangent. In the ever-expanding beer section of the excellent Avondale store on Mary Street, a friend and I were discussing the proposed social media legislation.

Out of the blue he said, "One reason discipline today is so different than before is that our parents and grandparents had different terms of reference. Military chains of command were much easier to comprehend."

I had never thought of that like that. And reflecting, two very influential people in my life had been military veterans. Officers. One from Australia, and one from Canada.

They were very dogmatic, and very strict. When they announced a decision, they weren't inviting comments and discussion.

And let's talk very briefly about discipline, consequences and punishment. I am not condoning "the way it was," but can we even imagine spanking and the dreaded strap today? Or even worse, a leather belt whacked on a bare backside?

Canada might be the next country to enact a social media ban for younger people. Ross Robinson writes about how this move harkens back to a time when kids had to deal with greater discipline from adults, but also had a lot more freedom to roam. UNSPLASH

Not that long ago, my friends. Isn't this food for thought?

Our parents weren't cruel or mean-spirited. It was just so different, back one generation. Such a short time ago.

Rambling back to the current discussions about banning social media for younger people. One headline from the May 4 Globe and Mail read, "Breaking teens' fixation on phones." An opinion piece by the communications manager at Outward Bound Canada. A bit too deep for me to really comprehend, somewhat academic, but points well-taken. And very Canadian in some ways.

I couldn't help but think that we Canadians dither a lot, and avoid making tough decisions. For example, why do cyclists have to wear helmets only until a certain age? Do our skulls suddenly get harder? And what message does this send to children?

And at construction zones on highways, why do we only have to reduce our speed if workers are present? By the time we notice workers are present, it could be too late. I shake my head. I do wonder.

Back now, rambling to the much-discussed social media ban for kids. Sounds great in principle, but what about the practice? How will this logical new policy be enforced? I know, I know, some schools have already taken the big leap, and we read good reports and comments.

And for a much more complete, scholarly opinion about the current phone ban, I will recommend you read an opinion piece by Joel Westheimer: he is a professor of democracy and education at the University of Ottawa.

His piece can be found on page A4 of the May 5 issue of the St. Catharines Standard. The headline, near the bottom of the page, is "Phone ban on its own isn't enough."

In my rambling opinion, he says it all, and it will be interesting to follow along as this important issue plays out.

Stay tuned, fasten your seat belts and be open minded. Try to keep up.

rossrocket9@gmail.com

TOWN OF NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE

NOTICE OF STUDY COMMENCEMENT

TRANSPORTATION MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT

What is this Study about?

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is amending its draft Transportation Master Plan (TMP), which was originally released for public comment in summer 2022. This amendment will reflect new policy direction, updated traffic conditions, and the latest growth projections for the community.

The amendment will review both current and future transportation needs across the Town, including roads, cycling, walking, and transit, and will update the recommend improvements to help people move safely and efficiently throughout Niagara-on-the-Lake up to the year 2041.

How is this Study being undertaken?

This study is being undertaken in accordance with Approach #1 of the Master Planning Process, as outlined in the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (MCEA) document (2024). The amended TMP will generally address Phases 1 and 2 of the MCEA process and will form the basis for the Schedule B and C projects identified within it (if any).

Your input is important:

Public consultation is a key part of this process, and your participation is encouraged. An online public consultation will be held to share information about the study, including existing conditions, potential solutions, and recommended next steps. For updates and opportunities to provide input, please visit the Town's project page: https://www.jointheconversationnotl.org/TransportationMasterPlan or scan the QR code.

Additional opportunities to share feedback will be available throughout the study.

Contact us:

If you wish to have your name added to the study mailing list and/or would like more information about this study, please contact:

Mike Komljenovic
Engineering Supervisor
Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake
Tel: (905) 468-3266
Email: Mike.Komljenovic@notl.com

Bob Williams
Senior Transportation Planner
Stantec Consulting Ltd.
Tel: (519) 585-7477
Email: Bob.Williams@stantec.com

All information will be collected in accordance with the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (2009).

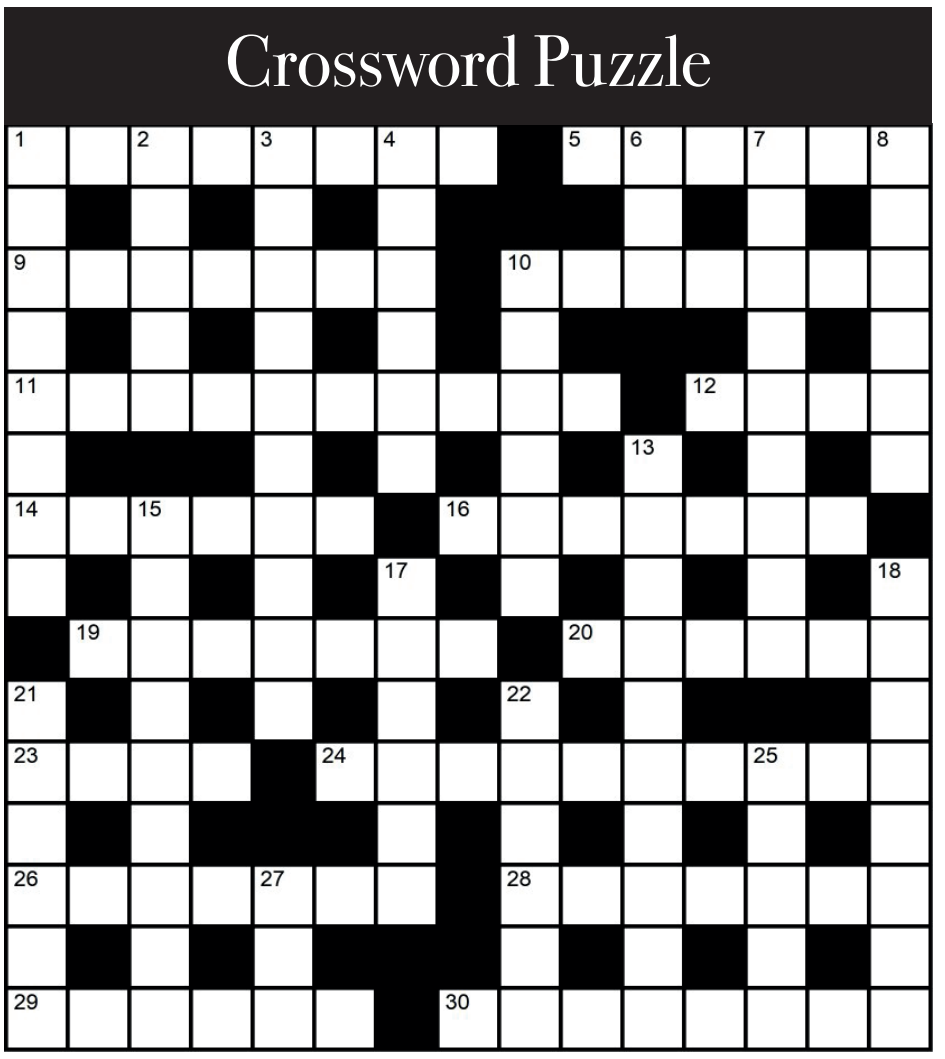
With the exception of personal information, all comments will become part of the public record.

This notice was issued May 7, 2026, and is available in alternate formats upon request.

GAMES

Have some fun

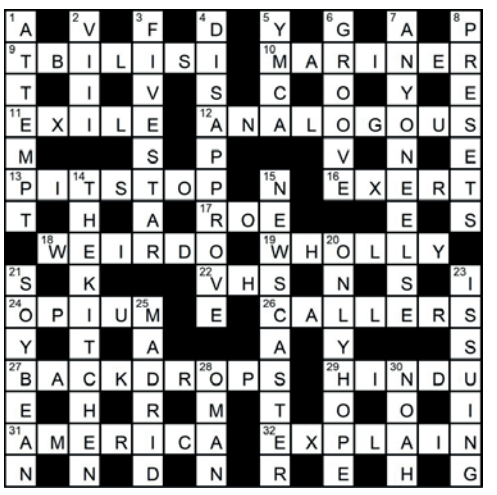
Crossword Puzzle



Across
1. Summer sky sights (8)
5. Desisted (6)
9. Made suitable (7)
10. Put in writing (3,4)
11. Grasp (10)
12. PIN points? (1,1,2)
14. Up till now (2,4)
16. Faith-based fight (4,3)
19. --- Oak ("Far from the Madding Crowd") (7)
20. Grieve (6)
23. Portal (4)
24. So careless about some hot dishes (10)
26. Declines (7)
28. Hibernia (7)
29. Spotting (6)
30. Becomes rigid (8)

Down
1. Dearth (8)
2. Sleep stopper (5)
3. The written classics (10)
4. Side-to-side measurements (6)
6. Corrode (3)
7. Cat breed (9)
8. Coffee accompaniment (6)
10. Elder (6)
13. Without assistance (2,8)
15. Large flying insect (9)
17. Flower attractions (6)
18. Every story has them (3,5)
21. Puts on a pedestal (6)
22. Holiday memento (1-5)
25. Depart (5)
27. Transgression (3)

Last issue's answers



		4	5		3		9	
		7		9			6	3
			8					
8		5	3	7	2	6		1
					4			
9	2			6		8		
	1		9		8	3		

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EXPLORING HISTORY
WITH NOTL MUSEUM

Niagara in bloom

In 1901, when the future King George V and Queen Mary (then the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York) visited Niagara-on-the-Lake for the royal visit, they entered a floral wonderland with installations everywhere. Three horticultural arches were built for the royal party. One was built on behalf of the town, one by Dr. Anderson on behalf of the children, and one by the proprietor of the Queen's Royal Hotel. Two of the arches that were located on Front Street are visible in this image. During Niagara-on-the-Lake in Bloom this Mother's Day weekend, the town will once again come alive with vibrant floral displays and garden-inspired celebrations.

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How humanity came to stand on its own two feet

DR. BROWN

Dr. William Brown
Columnist

Charles Darwin considered getting about on two legs as one of the most important evolutionary steps toward becoming human, and the fossil record supports his view.

Walking and running on two legs, known as bipedalism, freed up the arms and especially the hands for other tasks such as tool-making, creating art and music, all of which was enabled and fostered by increasingly larger brains.

The last common ancestor leading on one hand to chimpanzees and bonobos and on the other hand eventually to modern humans lived six to seven million years ago. While most of the last common ancestor's time was spent in the trees searching for food, rest and sleep, and keeping a wary eye out for predators, early adaptations for a bipedal existence on the ground gradually evolved.

The alternative to bipedal walking was knuckle-walking — an awkward way to get about on the ground, especially if you had to move quickly, because the feet weren't centered beneath the center of gravity, making for awkward walking and near impossible running.

To center successive footprints beneath the centre of gravity required re-engineering the pelvis to angle the hip, knee and foot joins more toward the midline, while the pelvis which would need to be refashioned to make birthing newborns as safe as possible.

Which brings up this question: how did natural selection reshape the pelvis and realign the hips, knees, ankles and feet for walking and running with a pelvis of the right shape and size for childbirth?

Those interrelated questions were tackled by an interdisciplinary group at Harvard and elsewhere led by Gayani Senevirathne, a post-doc student who with her colleagues, studied the anatomical changes and genes responsible for reshaping the pelvis in various primates past and present, mice and modern humans to make bipedalism efficient.

When you place your hands on your hips, your hands rest on the upper outermost rim of the largest bone in the pelvis: the ilium.

The ability to walk and run was a significant step (literally and figuratively) for humankind, freeing up the arms and hands for tasks that would help advance the species. WIKIMEDIA

The latter creates a large bowl-like structure anchored by the sacroiliac joint to the lumbosacral spine medially and which supports the pelvic floor muscles and much of the contents of the abdomen and pelvis.

The ilium also forms the boney sockets for the femur's bulbous heads to rotate in, and anchors several major muscles involved in walking.

Changes to the ilium played crucial roles in the evolution of bipedalism in species such as the australopiths, some variants of which such as A. afarensis (the famous Lucy) were bipedal most of the time while retaining some capacity for scampering up trees as needed. Then, beginning more than two million years ago, all homo species were fully capable of walking and running bipedally.

That capacity required remodeling the shape of key bones such as the ilium, femur, tibia and fibula and all the ankle and foot bones — as it turns out, without changing the genes responsible.

What changed was the timing with which the responsible genes were activated or silenced. That made all the difference in the shape of the forming cartilage templates that were later ossified to form the bones with which we're familiar.

Some of changes were dramatic. For example the cartilage template for humans forms horizontally in the anterior-posterior axis, whereas in primates who are not bipedal and mice, the cartilage template for the ilium forms in the top to bottom axis.

Once the cartilage templates are formed, osteocytes form calcified bone on the surface of the cartilage, thereby taking the form of the underlying cartilage template.

The process governing the formation of the ilium is probably universal. Tweak the timing and selection of existing genes to change the shape of cartilage first, then the bones to reshape other bones such as those that make up the skull, jaw, spine and their associated joints. That's the lesson Gayani Senevirathne and her colleagues taught us.

Their study also reminds us that the genome is far more complex than the many thousands of genes that code for specific protein. Genes sometimes works in teams and other genes, together other molecules called transcription factors, influence which genes are active, which are silent and the sequence of timing of both.

The genome might be likened to a deck of cards. What happens depends on what cards are in play — even as the whole deck of cards remains the same. Or, to piano keys: the music produced depends on the order and selection of the keys, but the keys remain the same.

Unfortunately, funding for this project came to an end last year as part of the federal governments cutbacks in the U.S.

P.S. If you want a readable book on how walking and running evolved, turn to Jeremy DeSilva's 2021 book, "First Steps."

Dr. William Brown is a professor of neurology at McMaster University and co-founder of the InfoHealth series at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library.

OBITUARIES

Kenneth Andres

ANDRES, Kenneth Arthur —

On Sunday, May 3, after his courageous fight with cancer, Ken went home to be with the Lord. He was born on Oct. 31, 1961, in Niagara Falls. Ken married the love of his life, Paula Goertz on May 7, 1988. A dedicated farmer, Ken devoted the greater part of his life to the family fruit farm. Known for his hard work and kind nature, he was well respected within the agricultural community. Ken was involved with ushering in church for over 35 years, enthusiastically welcoming all who came. He loved spending time with his beloved grandchildren. Jaxon and Hudson were his farming buddies and Harper and Juliet were Papa's princesses.

Predeceased by his mother Elvira (1967, Willms), father Art (2017), and brother Timothy (1973). He will be greatly missed by his wife, Paula, children Mark (Dana) Andres, Ashley (Corbin) Thwaites, Brandon (Brook) Andres, and loving Papa to Jaxon, Hudson, Harper, and Juliet. He will also be fondly remembered by his mother, Helen, father and mother-in-law Ken and Adeline Goertz, sisters, Sharon (Rudy), Christine (Marv), Joanne (Chris), brothers and sisters-in-laws, Kenn (Heidi), Tim (Teresa), Carolyn, Brad (Elaine), Julie (Brian), nieces, nephews, and countless others.

We would like to thank all the amazing medical staff that lovingly cared for Ken throughout his journey.

Visitation will be held at Bethany Mennonite Church on East West Line, Niagara-on-the-lake; on Monday, May 11, 2026, from 4 to 7 p.m. A private family internment will be held. Celebration of Life will be held at Bethany Mennonite Church on Tuesday, May 12, 2026, at 2 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, donations to Hospice Niagara and Walker Family Cancer Center would be greatly appreciated. Online condolences at www.tallmanfuneralhomes.ca

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Phebe Grauer Appleton

APPLETON, Phebe Grauer —

Phebe Grauer Appleton, 91, died peacefully in her home in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada, April 14, 2026.

Phebe was born Oct. 20, 1934 in Buffalo, N.Y., daughter of Harriet Richmond Grauer and Otto Christopher Ulbrich Grauer. She was raised in the Buffalo area with her sister Crista Margaret Grauer and summered in their family home in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Her greatest passions were gardening, entertaining, singing and playing tennis. As a child she attended Elmwood Franklin Elementary School, The Park School of Buffalo, and later, she boarded at the Masters School in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. She was a debutante in 1953 in Buffalo. She attended Skidmore College as an English Major and where she discovered her lovely voice. After college, she taught at Shady Hill School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1958, Phebe studied voice in Florence, Italy. She returned to the United States and taught elementary education in the Buffalo School System. In 1961, she married George Miller Appleton and they moved to Eden, N.Y. where she raised her three children. She continued to work as an Elementary Education teacher and later received her master's degree in Special Education at SUNY at Geneseo. Phebe sang with the Schola Cantorum and the Buffalo Philharmonic for many years and was a member of the Garret Club in Buffalo. In 1995, she remarried to Elijah (Nick) Carter, an Australian/Canadian lawyer. She became a dual citizen of the U.S. and Canada and took permanent residence in Niagara-on-the-Lake. She enjoyed traveling and gardening with her husband as well as their "Sunday Mystery Rides." She became an active member of St. Mark's Church, The Niagara Conservancy and the Evergreen Chorus. Phebe possessed a nurturing soul. She is remembered for her warmth, optimism, love of laughter, great knowledge of the NOTL town history, and everlasting adoration for her dogs. She was quick with a clever limerick when needed, known for masterful cooking, and a fervent dog walker. She is survived by, her daughter, Crista Marrington, son, Benjamin Appleton and wife Carol, daughter Catherine Appleton and husband, Kris Conner, six grandchildren, two great grandchildren and sister, Crista Margaret Grauer.

A memorial service will be held on June 13, 2026 at 11 a.m. at St. Marks Church, Niagara-on the-Lake followed by a reception. Those who wish to honour Phebe may send donations to St. Mark's Church or Willowbank School of Restoration Arts.

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