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The Lake Report

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



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Canada's most-awarded community newspaper

March 5, 2026



Gale letter to province floats reducing NOTL council to six members

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

After facing a barrage of backlash from politicians and residents across Niagara who rejected the idea of forcing the region's cities and towns to amalgamate, Niagara Regional Chair Bob Gale has gone back to the province with more ideas for changing regional governance — which could see Niagara-on-the-Lake's representation at the regional table shrink to one vote.

In a letter to Municipal Affairs Minister Rob Flack on Wednesday, Gale puts forth that starting this fall, with each municipality's next terms, Niagara Region should be reduced to 12 regional councillors, down from 32, introduced weighted voting based on the population of each municipality, cut down every municipalities' number of councillors and sharing services across the region.

This comes after Gale floated the ideal of amalgamating the Niagara region into either one or four cities in a letter to Flack on Feb.

Continued on Page 4

Canada's first sake master

Masaki Sushi's Yoshi Takaoka earns prestigious designation as expert sommelier



Masaki Sushi's Yoshi Takaoka is the first Canadian in history to receive a master sake sommelier accreditation. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Dan Smeenk | Local Journalism Initiative | The Lake Report

Yoshi Takaoka, manager and head sommelier at Niagara-on-the-Lake's Masaki Sushi, has become one of 46 people in the world — and the

only Canadian — to earn a master sake sommelier designation. He received the designation earlier this year during a course in Portland, Ore. Takaoka said such courses are typically held in

Europe and Asia, and the North American offering gave him the opportunity to pursue the credential.

He said reaching the master level required years of work

and study beyond his previous certifications.

"There's no like specific textbook before you take the exam,"

Continued on Page 8

Royal George demolition still on hold amid court delay

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Demolition of the Royal George Theatre will remain on hold after a Divisional Court judge delayed a scheduled hearing in a legal

challenge over the project.

The case, brought forward last month by Centurion Building Corporation and president Nicholas Colaneri, is asking the court to review whether the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake followed planning and heritage laws

when it approved the Shaw Festival's plan to tear down and rebuild the theatre.

In a new endorsement released March 2, Justice Byrdena MacNeil said the Feb. 26 judicial review hearing could not proceed because such cases must be

heard by a panel of judges unless special permission is granted.

The court held a meeting Feb. 27 to determine next steps and schedule a new hearing date. The hearing is now expected to take place March 25.

The endorsement says structural demolition of the Royal George, or the box office building next door, will not occur before March 23, while Shaw's chief executive officer, Tim Jennings,

Continued on Page 5



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NOTL council will fight 'tooth and nail' against amalgamation

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake councillors say they will fight any forced municipal amalgamation as the town ramps up its response to a regional governance review that could reshape how the Niagara region is governed.

On Wednesday, the Town of NOTL submitted its feedback on the prospect of amalgamation to the province, taking a stance against forcibly merging NOTL with other cities and towns in Niagara and arguing that the municipality is in good place and can stand on its own.

In it, the town asks Municipal Affairs Minister Rob Flack and Premier Doug Ford to rule out forced amalgamation for the town, saying it presents "a material risk" to local representation, its reserves and tax base, service delivery, agricultural and heritage stewardship.

"We cannot support structural change imposed in the absence of demonstrable benefit," said the submission's opening letter,



Coun. Erwin Wiens says he is vehemently opposed to any form of forced amalgamation, adding there is no evidence that supports the change.

signed by Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa.

The submission details the state of affairs in the municipality on a financial, operational, planning and governance basis, which Zalepa writes "demonstrate clearly and objectively that Niagara-on-the-Lake is financially stable, operationally strong and capable of continuing as an independent municipality."

It argues for NOTL's strength in the areas of infrastructure and asset management, housing and development, economic resilience and tourism management, agriculture and land stewardship, public safety, workforce

capacity and more.

The amalgamation issue emerged after newly appointed Niagara Region Chair Bob Gale contacted Ontario's minister of municipal affairs and housing on Feb. 19 about initiating a governance review for the region — a process that could include municipal amalgamation — and advised local mayors that municipalities would be asked to submit feedback to the province by March 3.

Last week, Niagara's regional council voted to launch a formal governance and service delivery review examining how the region and its 12 municipalities operate and directed Gale to stop from further action on amalgamation while the review is underway.

Gale has argued the region's governance system is inefficient, pointing to the region's 126 municipal elected officials across 12 municipalities and regional council and linking the debate to infrastructure costs, citing roughly \$2.7 billion in deferred infrastructure across the region.

The town created a governance working group

to co-ordinate its response, with members of the town's senior leadership team and Couns. Erwin Wiens, Tim Balasiuk, Wendy Cheropita and Sandra O'Connor.

Ruller said the group met regularly and worked with eight other municipalities against forced amalgamation "to establish a coordinated, unified municipal position."

Councillors made clear the town opposes any forced merger of municipalities.

Wiens pointed to the lack of evidence so far that amalgamation would benefit NOTL or the region.

"We do not support any sort of force of amalgamation. Full stop," he said. "There is no evidence that supports it and we are going to be fighting tooth and nail."

Wiens said the town was "ready to listen" when Gale made his presentation to council on Feb. 24, "but we wanted it to be evidence-based, data-driven and resident-supported."

"We have continued down that vein," he said.

He warned that NOTL, a historic town known for its tight-knit community, could

be particularly vulnerable in a larger merged municipality.

"Quite frankly, Niagara-on-the-Lake has the most to lose out of all of this," Wiens said.

While opposing forced amalgamation, council signalled it is willing to examine its own governance structure.

Wiens said the town should take the lead before changes are imposed from outside and introduced a motion to that effect, which council approved.

The motion directs staff to return to the March 24 council meeting with a report examining council composition across Niagara, outlining potential considerations for reducing the size of NOTL's council — effective for the next municipal election.

"Rather than waiting for something that's provincially directed or mandated, I'd like us to take the driver's seat," he said.

Council also supported Wiens' request that staff begin preparing the town's 2027 budget using a tax levy target tied to anticipated inflation "in a manner

that does not contribute to any increase to the town's existing infrastructure gap."

"It's crucial that the proposed budget does not worsen our infrastructure funding gap," Wiens said. "Infrastructure is clearly important to the premier."

He said the goal is to show the province the town is taking cost concerns seriously while considering what the premier and minister have said.

Cheropita thanked town staff and council members for moving quickly to respond to the issue.

"It was only eight days ago when we found out that amalgamation was going to happen," she said.

Since then, she said, staff and council have been working intensely behind the scenes — co-ordinate a response — something she described as "one of the greatest examples of having strategic action in motion."

"I'd like the residents to know that they're really in good hands," Cheropita said. "All of the things that they care about right now — and their voice — are being addressed."

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'No apologies' for amalgamation talks: Gale

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara Regional Chair Bob Gale is not backing down from his push to rethink how Niagara is governed — even after councillors voted to rein in his amalgamation efforts and launch their own review process.

Speaking at the Sheraton Fallsview Hotel in Niagara Falls on Friday, Gale delivered his State of the Region address to the residents of Niagara, covering issues such as infrastructure costs, tax pressures and governance reform.

"You can see some things out there written about me — I have a reason on everything I've done," Gale told the audience. "Some are confidential. I can't tell you. I will never tell you what will hurt you."

Two weeks ago, Gale wrote to the Municipal Affairs Minister Rob Flack calling for a review of Niagara's governance structure — including possible amalgamation — and asked Niagara's mayors to provide feedback by March 3.

Regional council instead voted on Feb. 26 to launch



Gale suggested that, like Canadians banded together against Trump's U.S., that his idea of amalgamating Niagara caused people "to come together." PAIGE SEBURN

its own formal governance review, directing staff to examine duplication, service efficiency and costs and to report back with data and public consultation before any structural changes move forward. Council also voted to direct Gale to stop his amalgamation efforts.

Any changes to Niagara's structure must move forward through that council-led process, not independently.

Gale framed that decision as momentum.

"I have heard from some unhappy people this week," he said. "But I make no apologies — because it's about time that regional council passed that motion."

At one point, Gale compared the debate to broader political moments, asking, "How much did Trump bring us together as Canadians? Maybe my conversation caused us to come together and say, 'We got to change things.'"

He said pushing for change on regional issues had, at times, strained his family and personal reputation.

"I did it for Niagara and the Niagara Parks," he said. "Don't get in my way for doing stuff on amalgamation or other things. I'm not saying I'm for amalgamation — I'm just saying I'm here for the right things."

During a public chat at the State of the Region hosted by the Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce, its CEO, Mishka Balsom, pressed him to define the problem he is trying to solve. Gale repeatedly returned to one word: efficiency.

He pointed to duplication between the region and local municipalities, slow permit approvals and what he described as the challenge of making decisions with 32 members around the regional council table.

"Cities take care of this, region takes care of this, ministry takes care of that — we can't go with that."

Gale said the Niagara South wastewater treatment plant, along with aging water systems and roads, tops the region's infrastructure priorities, warning that billions in upgrades are needed and taxpayers cannot bear the cost alone.

But he said Niagara must streamline services and control costs before seeking more funding from senior governments.

"Municipalities are not my responsibility," he said, "but we all have to get our house in order."

paigeseburn@niagaranow.com

Region directs Gale to stop amalgamation push

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

Niagara Region Chair Bob Gale was met with a surge of critical feedback from elected representatives last Thursday night on his push to reform the regional government and potentially merge Niagara's cities and towns.

Regional council voted to direct Gale to stop any further action connected to his amalgamation efforts. It also voted to begin in earnest a governance review of Niagara to look at improving service efficiency.

Several councillors at the special committee meeting said the region needs more time to consider the implications of amalgamating Niagara and closely examine the issues with Niagara Region's governance before making a decision.

NOTL Regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser was among the regional representatives calling for deeper consideration on the matter, calling the current timeframe "an affront to our local representation."

"I believe change must be grounded in evidence, fiscal



Regional councillors strongly rejected the idea of forced amalgamation of Niagara's towns and cities. FILE

responsibility and respect for local identity," she said.

The governance review regional council voted to initiate will involve, according to the passed motion, "data, a business case with financial analysis and public consultation."

Gale told NOTL council last Tuesday that his review is being driven solely by him and his office because of regional tax increases in recent years and a \$2.7-billion shortfall in infrastructure projects.

In his letter to Municipal Affairs Minister Rob Flack from Feb. 19, he highlights that the regional tax levy has gone up by almost 25 per cent in a single council

term.

Kaiser, however, told regional council on Thursday that merging Niagara's cities and towns won't slow the impact of rising police costs, which she says are what's driving region's budget hikes.

She said council needs to recognize "a significant portion" of region levy hikes have been tied to policing obligations under Ontario's Community Safety and Policing Act of 2019.

"These costs are provincially mandated. We don't have a choice in this matter," she said. "And they will not disappear through amalgamation."

Returning to the statistics

from Gale's letter to the minister, Kaiser said 4.4 per cent of the 6.3 per cent tax hike from last year was related to policing costs.

As for the almost 25 per cent regional tax hike over the last four years, 14.1 per cent of this, she said, was from policing costs.

She argued the region could've "taken some leadership" by decreasing discretionary costs to allow it to invest in infrastructure and capital projects.

"If our cost pressures are structural (and) policing infrastructure provincially downloaded, quite simply, amalgamation does not solve the root issue. It simply changes who manages it," she said.

Amalgamation, Kaiser added, would centralize decision-making, affecting the democratic representation NOTL's councillors offer the people who live there.

"Our residents elect representatives who understand the nuances of each community. In Niagara-on-the-Lake, it is our heritage district, our agriculture land base and our tourism economy," she said.

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Gale proposes council cuts for Niagara

Continued from Front Page

19. To NOTL council last week, he cited concerns about Niagara Region's "broken" governance, including regional tax increases and a \$2.7-billion shortfall in infrastructure projects.

The reduction in regional councillors would mean only the region's 12 mayors would get a seat at the regional table, plus the regional chair. Right now, NOTL is represented by two people at Niagara Region: Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa and Regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser.

Each mayors' vote would be weighted according to the size of their city or town per each 15,000 residents — meaning a city of 100,000 residents would get six votes, while a town with 6,000 residents would get one vote.

This means NOTL, which has a population of a little more than 19,000 people, would get one vote

March 4, 2026

The Honourable Rob Flack
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Government of Ontario
Delivered via email: minister_mah@ontario.ca
CC: Robert Dodd, Chief of Staff to Minister Flack
Niagara Regional Councillors

Re: Regional Governance in Niagara

Dear Minister Flack,

Following my earlier correspondence on options for improving governance in the Niagara Region, I received considerable feedback from regional councillors, local councils and residents about both the process and the substance of that discussion.

While I heard criticism with the initial lack of advance consultation, it was widely acknowledged that the current structure of 126 municipally elected officials across 12 municipalities and 31 members at Regional Council is not as lean, efficient or affordable as it should be.

In addition to many phone calls, emails, meetings, and letters (including the letter received today from mayors of the lower-tier municipalities), I also held a special regional meeting on February 26th. Throughout this process I heard from the public, regional councillors and mayors. They:

- Agreed that we must reduce duplication and improve coordination and shared services, rather than defend the status quo.
- Expressed support for reducing the overall number of elected officials at both tiers.
- Raised weighted voting at the regional table as a fair way to reflect population differences while preserving a voice for every municipality.

I have also heard from several major private-sector employers, representing more than 12,000 employees across Niagara, who have written in support of streamlined, more decisive local governance.

In light of these discussions and consultations, I propose the following made-in-Niagara option, effective at the start of the next municipal term in fall 2026:

Regional Chair Bob Gale sent this letter to the minister of municipal affairs and housing on Wednesday. SOURCED

at Niagara Region. The biggest city in the region, St. Catharines, has an estimated population of 136,803 people, according to Gale's letter — it would get nine votes.

Gale also proposes cutting NOTL's council down to six members, plus the lord mayor, meaning two fewer councillors representing the municipality's residents in town hall.

He proposes no cuts for St. Catharines and Niagara Falls' councils, which he said will have their current numbers, 12 and eight, respectively.

Gale briefly acknowledged the negative feedback to his amalgamation push in his latest letter to Flack: "While I heard criticism with the initial lack of advance consultation, it was widely acknowledged that the current structure of 126 municipally elected official across municipalities and 31 members of regional council is not as lean, efficient or affordable as it should be."

He said his latest recommendation avoids "the disruption and risk of full amalgamation at this time," "strikes a pragmatic balance" between fiscal responsibility democratic representation and local autonomy and will get more support across Niagara than "any immediate move to full amalgamation."

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Our photo from 2024 drew a large crowd. This year we'd like to double it, or more. Please invite everyone you know. There will be light refreshments, too. Meet at 1 p.m. Photo at 1:30 SHARP!

Help us celebrate NOTL women

International Women's Day is just around the corner, and The Lake Report is proud to continue its tradition of celebrating the incredible women of our community.

Over the years, our International Women's Day coverage — and especially our big group photos — have become some of our favourite and most meaningful pages to publish. They're a snapshot of the strength, diversity and spirit of women in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and we'd love to make this year's photo the biggest yet.

We're inviting all women in town to come be part of it on Sunday, March 8, 2026, at Simcoe Park.

Here's the plan:

We'll start gathering and mingling at 1 p.m. so everyone has time to connect and enjoy some light refreshments.

The photo will be taken at 1:30 p.m. SHARP.

Please plan to arrive early to make sure you don't miss out. Feel free to invite any women you know — moms, daughters, sisters, friends, neighbours — everyone is welcome.

Shaw voluntarily halted work, executive says

Continued from Front Page

says Shaw demolition will not proceed until after the March 25 hearing. The work had originally been scheduled for late March or early April.

"The Shaw Festival undertakes to the court that the Shaw Festival shall not undertake any demolition of the structures on the Queen Street properties known municipally as 79 and 83 Queen St., which includes the Royal George Theatre, before March 23," said the endorsement.

It said Shaw lawyers warned the matter is urgent and any further delays could "seriously impact in a negative manner on the project's funding."

The Lake Report asked Shaw how delays could affect project funding, but the organization said it would not provide further comment because the matter is before the courts.

Jennings said the pause is voluntary.

"The court has not ordered a stay," he said in a March 3 statement. "Shaw agreed to this undertaking of its own volition after the initial hearing was delayed."



Shaw Festival's lawyers said have said further delays to the construction timeline for the new Royal George could "seriously impact" the project's funding. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

"We, together with the town, believe this review will find all matters were properly conducted by both the town and the Shaw, and look forward to this being resolved quickly."

Jennings said Shaw is "continuing with other work on the project while this matter is waiting to be heard." Shaw declined to elaborate further on what work is currently underway, saying the matter is before the courts.

Colaneri said the case is about ensuring the town's

decision followed the law before demolition occurs.

"Demolition is irreversible. Once it happens it cannot be undone," he said in an email.

Maintaining the pause allows the court to review whether the town's decision complied with planning and heritage laws before "something permanent occurs," he added.

"What's at stake is public confidence and trust in how decisions are made in our town."

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa said he is "confident that the town is preparing for that review" and that council looks forward to the outcome.

Communications coordinator Marah Minor said the town cannot comment because the matter is under litigation and added no permissions for any sort of "activities" have been granted for lands at 79-83 Queen St. since the demolition pause took effect.

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One year later, 'buy Canadian' sentiment remains strong

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Last year, the start of the Canada-U.S. tariff war ignited an era of uncertainty for Canada's economy.

The nation began a pivot to find prosperity outside of its relationship with its neighbours down south, which, with Prime Minister Mark Carney's relationship-building trips to India and China this winter, is continuing.

Enter, the "buy Canadian" movement — a major push by Canadian consumers, politicians and companies to direct the collective spending power of the nation toward Canadian goods and services.

Here in Niagara-on-the-Lake, while some business owners say shoppers have taken a greater interest in supporting all things Canadian, one says there are factors beyond what people choose to buy impacting the success of homegrown products.

Tony Hendricks, who owns Your Independent Grocer in Virgil, said the "buy Canadian" sentiment



Jamie-Lynn Jones, manager at Cool as a Moose in Old Town, is proud of its Canadian content. She said that since the "buy Canadian" movement started, she has seen more Canadian and international visitors to her store. DAN SMEENK

is still going strong with its customers.

"Our customers still feel very passionate about buying Canadian products and supporting Canadian jobs," he said via email.

"The Canada flags have now been incorporated into our electronic shelf labels. Sales of Canadian made and

produced products remains much higher than before any tariff talk."

Data from the Bank of Canada supports that view: while tracking consumer buying patterns can be difficult, the bank reported a two per cent increase in purchases of Canadian food products beginning last

March.

The increase continued through the summer and coincided with a two per cent drop in purchases of American products.

Jamie-Lynn Jones, manager of Cool as a Moose on Queen Street, sells Niagara-on-the-Lake and Canada-themed souvenirs to tour-

ists. She said the Cool as a Moose brand and its parent company, Coastal Culture, have always emphasized Canadian products.

"We've always been a really Canadian store," said Jones. "We're about 75 per cent either designed or made in Canada."

Since last March Break, she has seen a "huge" increase in Canadian customers, particularly from Ontario. Many appear to be choosing to travel within the province rather than cross the border.

"It seemed to be a lot of people that wanted to somewhere within three hours of home," said Jones. "But they were choosing to stay on this side of the border, than go to the American side."

The Bank of Canada also reported a sharp shift in travel patterns, with 25 per cent fewer Canadian visits to the United States in 2025 compared with 2024.

However, over at Your Independent Grocer in Old Town, Phil Leboudec said the "buy Canadian" campaign hasn't significantly affected his store.

"I think they appreciated the exposure, so they could

make informed choices," he said.

Leboudec said his store does not track product origins and does not have data on where the products customers buy are made. Loblaw manages product sourcing, and his store has not made a deliberate shift to Canadian suppliers.

The global nature of supply chains, he said, means decisions about buying Canadian often happen beyond the store level.

"I'm just the end guy," said Leboudec.

Still, he believes broader changes may be underway.

"Even a year's not a long time to change supply chains," said Leboudec. "There's contracts that have to be done, there's growing regions have to expand, there's just all kinds of things."

At the higher level, back in December, the federal government introduced a "buy Canadian" policy to ensure Canadian products and workers are prioritized in federal procurement decisions, affecting contracts valued at \$25 million or more.

daniel@niagaranow.com

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Takaoka is one of the world's 46 master sake sommeliers

Continued from Front Page

he said. "Because ... we will be the master, we need to know everything regarding sake."

Candidates had to demonstrate extensive knowledge of sake and guest service, including how to introduce and present different varieties, he said.

According to Masaki Sushi's website, Takaoka has curated a collection of more than 80 sakes, one of the most extensive selections in Canada.

Before qualifying for the master designation, he earned several advanced certifications: Certified Sake Sommelier, Certified Sake Professional, International Kikisake-shi and the Wine and Spirit Education Trust Level 3 Award in sake.

Originally from Japan, Takaoka first came to Canada in "2005 or 2006" as a high school exchange student in Vancouver to learn English. He later taught Japanese culture to students, including a class in Stratford that included a young Justin Bieber.

He later enrolled in Niagara College's restaurant management program

and worked for "five or six years" in Niagara Falls, including at the Marriott Hotel.

"Most of my skills was working in Niagara Falls," said Takaoka, who added he had "some skill" in Japan as well. He said his management abilities grew as he combined European and North American techniques with what he had learned in Japan.

In 2017, he joined the group that opened Masaki Sushi. The restaurant serves a range of Japanese dishes and offers multiple sakes, including a Niagara-branded sake available exclusively at Masaki Sushi.

Takaoka said sake, made from fermented rice, water, koji mold and yeast, carries a strong spiritual component, with a tradition spanning more than 2,000 years rooted in Shinto.

"We always use sake as holy drink," he said. "It's like the mother drink for Japanese people."

While sake is widely consumed in Japan and sommeliers are less in demand there, he said the role carries more significance in Canada, where guests may be less familiar with the drink.



Yoshi Takaoka of Masaki Sushi, pictured here with a unique bottle of Niagara sake, says Japan's national beverage carries a spiritual significance dating back more than 2,000 years. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Takaoka said understanding guests is central to being a good sommelier.

"Most important is through the conversation," he said. "So, what type of family background, what

type of cuisine do you like, also what type of wine do you like."

Although he is the only master sake sommelier at the restaurant, Takaoka said Masaki Sushi relies

on a team of sommeliers and staff.

"We need a team," he said. "It's really important for the entire restaurant."

Takaoka will also be leading a sake tasting

event called Sake Journey Niagara. It will be on April 11 at the Royal Cambridge Banquet Hall in the Prince of Wales Hotel. It will take place from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

daniel@niagaranow.com

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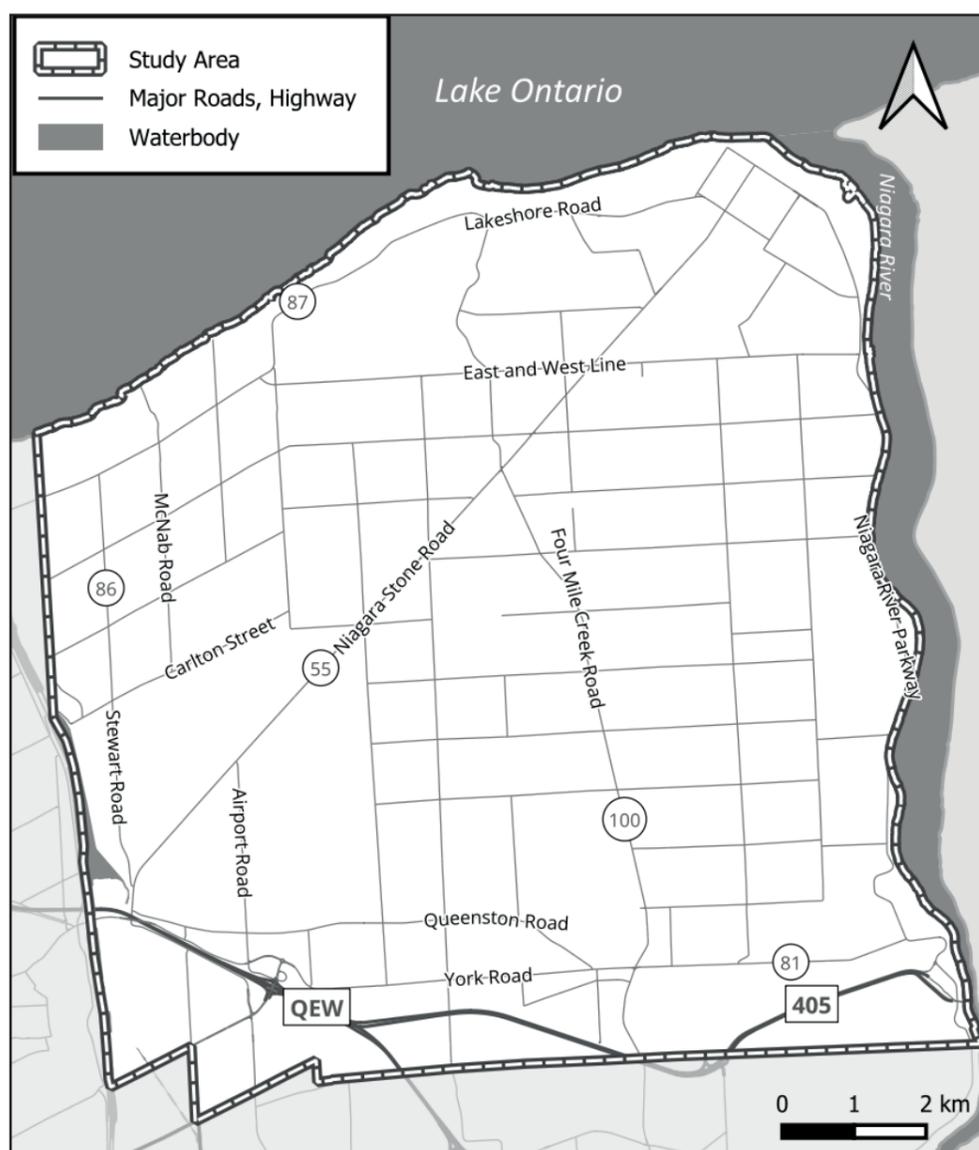
NOTICE OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION POLLUTION PREVENTION CONTROL PLAN

What is this Study About?

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake have retained GEI Consultants (GEI) to update the Pollution Prevention Control Plan (PPCP). This update study will serve as an opportunity to reassess the Town's sanitary sewer system's current condition and ability to accommodate growth. The update study will develop a holistic long-term management plan that clearly outlines the short and long-term servicing strategy to manage the wastewater system and future growth in Niagara-on-the-Lake expected by 2051 and beyond, while demonstrating to the Ministry of Environment, Conservation, and Parks that the system performance adheres to the F-5-5 requirements.

How is this Study Undertaken?

This study will be undertaken as a Master Planning Study satisfying Phases 1 and 2 of the Municipal Engineers Association Class Environmental Assessment process (October 2000, as amended in 2007, 2011, 2015, 2023 and 2024), which is an approved process under the Ontario Environmental Assessment Act. This study will include an evaluation of alternatives to support the long-term sustainability and management of the wastewater systems.



Virtual Presentation and Comment Period

Niagara-on-the-Lake, led by GEI, is hosting a pre-recorded virtual presentation, which will be posted from March 25 to April 8th, 2026, to provide details about the study and present the developed alternative solutions. To view the recording or presentation material and leave comments, please do so by scanning the QR code with your smartphone or through the following link: <https://www.jointheconversationnotl.org/pollution-prevention-control-plan>

The comment period is an opportunity to engage with the project team and provide comments on the project. The presentation and a copy of the presentation boards will be made available on the project website during and after the comment period. Any further questions and comments you may have can be submitted directly through the project website via the comments form.

Contact Us

Please contact the following project team members at any time during this study if you have any questions or comments, wish to be added to the study contact list, or to request accessible formats:

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905-643-6688
SCarey@geiconsultants.com



With the exception of personal information, all comments will become part of the public record of the study. The study is being conducted according to the requirements of the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment, which is a planning process approved under Ontario's Environmental Assessment Act.

This notice was first issued on March 5, 2026

Longtime head of Newark Neighbours food bank **retires**

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

The manager of Niagara-on-the-Lake's only food bank says she's stepping down as the head of operations, with her replacement taking the helm effective immediately.

Newark Neighbours announced that Cindy Grant has decided to retire from her volunteer role as the organization's manager, with Genevieve Lawrence taking over as interim food bank manager.

Grant, who's been a volunteer with Newark Neighbours for about 10 years, says it was her personal decision to step down from her role.

"I've done as much as I wanted to, or devoted as much time as I needed to Newark Neighbours," she said. "It was just time for new people to come in and take over."

Newark Neighbours, which has been open since 1971, is NOTL's only food bank. It feeds residents dealing with food insecurity and also operates a

thrift store at its location on Niagara Stone Road in Virgil.

"It's a terrific group of volunteers, a dedicated group of volunteers that work at Newark Neighbours," Grant said. "I will miss them, but it was time for me to move on."

Grant wears many hats in the community: she's the current president of the Rotary Club of NOTL, leader of the NOTL Senior Housing Advisory Committee and the former president of the NOTL Horticultural Society.

"I need to provide some time to myself, give myself some more personal time and start to devote (it) to other groups and work in the community," she said. "And that meant that I needed to give up my time at Newark Neighbours."

Grant, who became the Rotary Club's president in July, said she will serve her one-year term as its leader until the end of June. She stepped down as the horticultural society's president this past fall.

Her replacement, Law-



After a decade of dedicated volunteer work for Newark Neighbours, including overseeing the move to its new Virgil location, Cindy Grant is retiring from the food bank and thrift shop to make time for her many other roles. FILE

rence, has been a member of the food bank team for the past several years, said Newark Neighbours in a media release.

"Genevieve will do a terrific job," she said. "She has my full support."

Newark Neighbours' board chair, Nancy Jackson, says the organization will be holding elections for its next food manager in the spring, at its annual general meeting.

Alongside her other

volunteer efforts, Grant said she's working with the Nyanyas of Niagara, which raises funds for the Stephen Lewis Foundation, support grandmothers in Africa raising grandchildren orphaned by AIDS.

Right now, she's focused on preparing for an upcoming fundraiser on April 23, which will see former Canadian ambassador to the United Nations Bob Rae appear as a speaker.

zahraa@niagaranow.com

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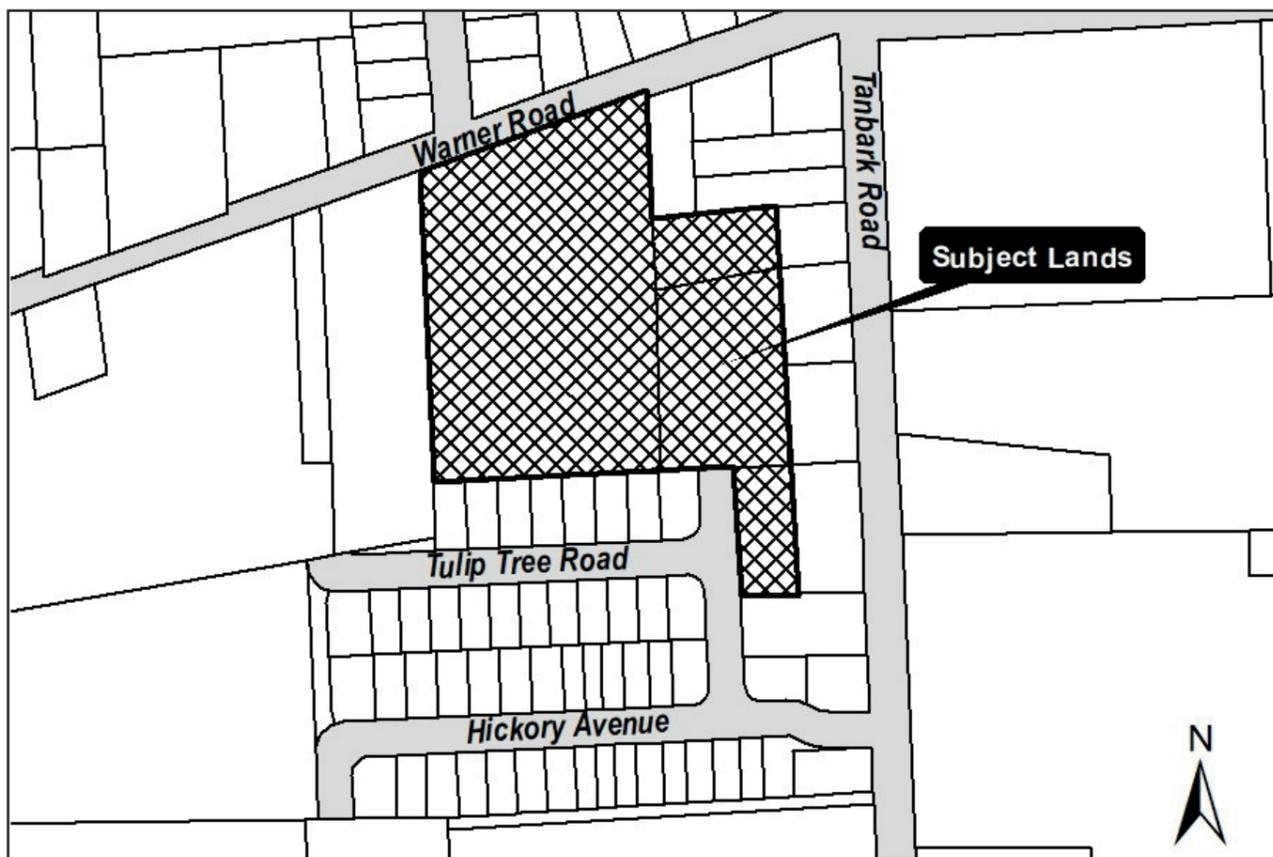
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NOTICE OF INTENTION TO PASS AMENDING ZONING BY-LAW TO REMOVE HOLDING (H) SYMBOL

What: Notice of **Intention to Pass an Amending Zoning By-law to Remove Holding (H) Symbol** (under Section 36 of the *Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990* as amended).

Regarding: File ZBA-14-2025 – Tawny Ridge Phase 2 | South of Warner Road and North of Chestnut Avenue, Niagara-on-the-Lake



What is this?

The Zoning By-law Amendment application proposes to remove the Holding (H) symbol that applies to the subject lands (see location map) through site-specific Zoning By-law 4316FD-24, as approved by Town Council on February 6, 2024.

The Holding (H) symbol shall only be removed upon final approval of a stormwater management strategy. Removal of the Holding (H) symbol will permit the development of Subdivision contains 20 lots for single-detached dwellings, 24 on-street townhouse dwellings, and a Block for a future phase of development, all accessed via Chestnut Avenue as an extension of the future public road, and Warner Road.

The required stormwater management documents have been reviewed and approved through a separate ongoing process with the Town (File 26T-18-24-07).

The removal of the Holding (H) symbol will be considered at the Committee of the Whole - General Meeting on March 10, 2026, via a Staff Report. The Staff Report will be released with the Committee of the Whole - General agenda on March 5, 2026, on the Town's website at <https://www.notl.com/council-government/meetings-agendas-minutes>.

Town Council may pass the required Zoning By-law Amendment to remove the Holding (H) symbol from the subject lands no earlier than the March 24, 2026, Council meeting. Under Section 36(3) of the Planning Act, only the applicant has appeal rights with respect to the removal of a Holding (H) symbol. There are no third-party rights to appeal the proposed Zoning By-law Amendment.

The opportunity to make a delegation or oral presentation on this application will be during for the Committee of the Whole - General meeting on March 10, 2026. If you wish to make an oral presentation or delegation, in-person or electronically, at the Committee of the Whole – General meeting on this matter, you must register in advance by completing the Delegation Form on the Town's website at <https://www.notl.com/delegation-requests>. The deadline to register as a delegation on this application is Monday, March 9, 2026, at 12:00 p.m.

If you wish to view the Committee of the Whole - General or Council meeting for information purposes, registration is not required. The meetings will be recorded and available for viewing on the Town's website at <https://www.notl.com/council-government/mayor-council/meetings-agendas-minutes>.

Please contact Christopher Mazerolle, Development Coordinator, at 905-468-3266 Ext. 334 or via email at christopher.mazerolle@notl.com if additional information is required.

A copy of the application and supporting documents for the proposal may be obtained on the Town's website at <https://www.notl.com/business-development/public-planning-notices> or at the Planning, Building and Development Services Department within Town Hall (1593 Four Mile Creek Road, Virgil, ON).

Dated at the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, **March 5, 2026**

Grant Bivol, Town Clerk

Legion issues awards for art and writing to two NOTL schools

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Royal Canadian Legion Branch 124 in Niagara-on-the-Lake presented awards Monday to students at St. Michael Catholic Elementary School and Royal Oak School for artwork and writing created to honour Remembrance Day.

Students submitted their work on Remembrance Day. A panel of three Legion judges — David Antscherl, Penny-Lynn Cookson and Gail Kerr — selected the winners. Students completed all artwork by hand and were not allowed to use computers.

Amelia Walton won first place in the Grade 8 colour poster category for her depiction of the National War Memorial in Ottawa. She said her grandfather and uncle both served in the armed forces.

Her grandfather worked as a military reporter, and her uncle fought wildfires in Los Angeles and took part



Royal Oak School students who placed in the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 124 art and poetry contest are recognized Monday by legion members for their Remembrance Day-themed entries. DAN SMEENK

in the procession following Queen Elizabeth II's death, she said.

"I would say I've grown up with that stuff," she said.

"I've heard so many different stories."

Walton said one of her "dream jobs" is to work in forensics.

Stan Harrington, chair of the Legion's youth and education committee, said judges were impressed by both the quality of the sub-

missions and the students' reverence for veterans.

He recalled a Grade 7 student from Royal Oak School suggesting a mo-

ment of silence while visiting graves.

"I think we need to take a minute of silence," she said.

"It got me a little choked up," Harrington said.

Awards for St. Davids Public School will be presented at a later date, Harrington said. Crossroads Public School did not participate this year.

First-place winners received \$15, second place \$10 and third place \$5. First-place recipients also received a pin, and all winners were given certificates.

Some first-place entries will advance to the Legion's zone competition, which includes submissions from multiple branches. Winners at that level may move on to district competitions across larger areas of Ontario, followed by a provincial contest and then the national level.

Lori Beak, a member of the committee, said zone and district competitions will take place over the next couple of months.

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Eagle rides the borderline

Award-winning Lake Report photographer Dave Van de Laar captured this shot of a bald eagle flying along the Niagara River on Feb. 28. Perhaps as it soared, it was in a state of deep contemplation of whether or not it appreciates being a symbol of U.S. culture in this day and age. We imagine it decided to stay in Canada, like many Canadians have chosen to do over the past year. DAVE VAN DE LAAR



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Sky-high proposal and some jerk in Jamaica

Richard Harley
Editor-in-Chief

It was an epic trip with some excellent people — and, inevitably, some jerk.

We left for Jamaica on Feb. 17 on an early flight — our first trip without our three boys, Liam, Landon and Levi.

I had a plan: propose to my now-fiancée Alanna (she said yes) in some sort of grand and romantic fashion. Easy, right?

Not so much.

Planning romantic gestures is not exactly a male strong suit. For weeks I ran through ideas in my head. I could write it in the sand. I could do it at a fancy steak dinner.

Nothing felt right. Everything seemed a little too predictable.

Then the light bulb finally went off.

Alanna's favourite movie of all time is "The Wedding Singer," for the scene where Adam Sandler serenades his girlfriend on an airplane with help from Billy Idol.

What if I did that?

The idea sounded great — until I realized the logistical nightmare of actually pulling it off. Alanna isn't easy to fool. If I suddenly wandered off to talk to ground staff or the flight crew she'd immediately suspect something.

So I did what any shameless man would do: I pretended I had stomach issues.

Multiple "urgent" bathroom trips later — much to her chagrin — I managed to sneak away to the departure gate. The problem was, we were too early and no staff were there yet.

Eventually I tracked down a customer service desk, where they told me I'd have to speak directly with the flight crew.

So I waited. And waited.

Of course, we had moved seats closer to the gate, which made sneaking away even harder.

Finally I spotted someone who looked like part of the crew disappearing behind a pillar. My chance.

I jumped up like it was an emergency and hurried over, explaining my plan: I wanted to sing "Grow Old With You" from the movie and propose on the plane.



Your newspaper guy is engaged — she said yes!

The woman was a ground crew member and said she'd pass the message along.

Back to my seat I went.

I didn't see her again until we were boarding. She caught my eye, I hung back while Alanna continued ahead, and she told me the flight crew knew the plan and would take my guitar up front.

That part wasn't suspicious. I bring my small guitar on flights fairly often.

But Alanna immediately noticed I had fallen behind and asked why.

Thinking quickly, I told her the crew said I needed to check the guitar up front.

That explanation didn't go over smoothly.

In true Irish fashion she pushed back immediately and said to just bring it to the seat. I didn't want to argue too much — the last thing I needed was her figuring everything out.

She already suspected a proposal might be coming. We had done things slightly out of order — baby first, house second — so the next step wasn't exactly a mystery.

Without realizing it, she was unintentionally sabotaging my plan at every turn.

At that point I still hadn't spoken directly with the flight attendants and was starting to wonder how this was actually going to happen.

But when we boarded, they gave me a look.

And I knew they knew.

It's remarkable how much humans can communicate with a simple glance.

We found our seats and, if you've seen "The Wedding

Singer," you'll know it was absolutely imperative she got the window seat.

One of the attendants came over shortly after and said they needed to take the guitar up front. Perfect.

Alanna resisted again — saying we normally just put it in the overhead bin — but this time I quickly handed it over before she could derail the plan again.

During the flight I made a few more strategic "bathroom trips" to coordinate with the crew. We decided the moment would come after the first service.

Finally, the time arrived.

The flight attendants moved the passenger sitting beside us, rushed through the water service — and then came over the intercom in Billy Idol fashion.

"We have a special announcement for one of our economy passengers in seat E26," they said.

And I was off.

I walked down the aisle, belting out the song as loudly as I could over the roar of the engines, locking eyes with the woman I want to spend the rest of my life with.

Alanna hates being the centre of attention. But in that moment, she didn't mind.

I told her how much I loved her, handed her the ring — and she gave the answer I was hoping for.

"Of course I will."

We kissed, the entire plane burst into applause.

It all happened so quickly, and suddenly the flight didn't seem long at all.

The crew even gave us a congratulatory card and

comped our champagne.

And, selfishly, I felt relieved I wouldn't spend the entire vacation nervously waiting for the right moment.

It was perfect.

Mostly.

Because a couple of days later we ran into something else entirely.

We met plenty of wonderful people during the trip — everyone was excited for us and genuinely kind.

Then a group of rowdy Americans arrived.

This happened the day after Canada lost to the U.S. in Olympic hockey, so they started with the predictable chirping about the game.

We congratulated them. That's what Canadians do.

But after a few drinks one of them decided to escalate things.

He loudly announced that Canada would be "the 52nd state soon anyway — along with Greenland."

Joking about sports is one thing. Joking about invading sovereign countries is something else entirely.

One Canadian nearby spoke up.

"You know, that's actually really rude and hurtful."

And suddenly a whole group of Canadians — myself included — joined in.

We reminded them that the last time our countries went to war Canadians burned down the White House.

His friends went quiet. He turned red. A crowd of Canadians had gathered.

Eventually he apologized, but he didn't speak to any of us again.

And honestly, that interaction stuck with me. Because it felt like a small metaphor for something bigger.

When Canadians are polite, we're very polite.

But when someone crosses a line — disrespecting our country, our neighbours or basic decency — Canadians also have a backbone.

A stronger one, in fact, than many people seem to assume.

And it reminded me of something important.

Kindness isn't weakness.

But push Canadians too far, and you'll find out very quickly that politeness has its limits.

editor@niagaranow.com

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THE TURNER REPORT

Garth Turner
Columnist

Toronto, the city not the sprawl, has a population of 3.2 million and pays its top bureaucrat \$433,981.

NOTL, the beautiful, is home to 19,000 people and pays its guy \$234,000.

Ten years ago, our town had six people on the province's 'sunshine list' of top-paid civil servants. This year, we have 30 employees listed there (the cutoff is \$100,000 a year in salary). The total number of NOTL employees is currently 80, which means about 40 per cent are on the list.

So, is this a problem? Is this place over-governed and profligate in its staff wages? Have our mayor-with-super-powers and the other elected folk been too generous doling out property tax dollars?

Doug Ford thinks so. It's this kind of town hall reality which has helped foster talk about amalgamation – taking all the places in Niagara and mooshing them together into one entity. One mayor. One council. One CAO. One government.

The premier says any union will have to come from the region itself, but at the same time he's mocking 126 elected politicians in this area (500,000 people) when there are only 124 members of provincial parliament (for the Ontario population of 16.2 million).



This tower crane is a rare site in Old Town NOTL. It's now dumping concrete into forms for a parking garage beneath the Parliament Oak hotel. Many fear amalgamation could bring more cranes. GARTH TURNER

His comments from last week leave zero doubt the wheels are in motion for a forced marriage, despite all the grief and pushback the idea's garnering.

Old-timers look around this place and shake their heads. The public school is gone. The high school is no more. The hospital closed. There's no doctor you can walk or bike to. But we have hotels up the wazoo, more coming and a massive tourist-fetching theatrical complex ripping up the Old Town's main drag.

Is it a community, still? Or a heritage theme park?

As we know, Queen's Park has a boffo Destination Niagara strategy, aiming to turn the region into a Las Vegas, but without palm trees or Adele. In addition to more casinos, the Shaw's Royal George mega-project is a big part of that (Ford is throwing in \$35 million). The province's aim is to double the number of tourists coming to Niagara. That arouses the local Chamber of Commerce but seems certain to put even more pressure on the locals.

Having a single-tier government in Niagara is logical if the region is going

to turn into one giant playground for GTA refugees and all those Americans. Currently, there are 12 local governments plus the regional one — led by a recent Ford appointee and cheerleader for amalgamation, Bob Gale.

There are two models on the table. One big single city. Or four smaller ones. Even in that second scenario, poor little erudite NOTL would be submerged into the tinsel swirl of Niagara Falls and the F-150 grit of Fort Erie. Woe would be us.

Our lord mayor has dumped on the idea, saying it would betray the history, heritage and culture that his recent council has been working to upend. It's a memorable moment of hypocritical outrage. But then, he'd be out of a job otherwise.

For the record, turning us into a 'burb of the Falls or the pointy part of a big region would likely be the beginning of the end of NOTL. For all the bad decisions that have impacted us, this place is unique — and not just for having more gelato than Italy and horses with jobs.

We were the capital once. The Americans torched us. We trained Great War soldiers. We've retained architecture that draws millions to see. The river and lake and trees are stunning. Nowhere else in Canada does this reality exist.

It's worth fighting for. But if we lose, then maybe secede? Seems we have enough people already to run a country.

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

garth@garth.ca

Theatre teardown should've happened **years ago**

Dear editor:

I enjoy Garth Turner's witty though sarcastic comments in The Lake Report. In the last issue, he rails against the chaos of demolishing the Royal George ("The Turner Report: So much digging. So little telling").

I think that with crumbling

foundation and lack of space and facilities, this should have occurred years ago.

My concern is the excessive building on Victoria Street for rehearsal space, meeting rooms and maybe moving costumes from Virgil? Could those facilities not have been housed in the vast area of space where

Upper Canada Lodge was?

And now that town council and we concerned citizens have staved off amalgamation, all I would have to worry about is lack of an X-ray facility in NOTL and where to buy ball-point pen refills.

*Elizabeth Oliver-Malone
NOTL*



This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style
Category: NOTABLE NAMES

In 2023 this Nobel Peace Prize laureate called for a global movement to end gender apartheid by the Taliban.

Last issue category: COME OUT AND PLAY

Clue: "Squid Game" put a gruesome twist on this stop-and-go game also called Statues.

Answer: What is red light green light?

Answered first by: Sue Rautenberg

Also answered correctly (in order) by:
Susan Hamilton, Lynda Collet, Catherine Clarke, Jim Dandy, Esther VanGorder, Wade Durling, Donna Pearce, Marla Percy, Sheila Meloche, Dawn Walker-Krahn, Katie Reimer

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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Secord House, the Shaw and the struggle for Niagara's future



ARCHITEXT

Brian Marshall
Columnist

This week, I'd like us to lightly visit several items which have significant ramifications to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Let's begin with the David Secord House at 46 Paxton Ln. — a heritage building of local, provincial and national importance which this columnist outlined in the Feb. 6, 2025 edition of The Lake Report ("Archi-i-text: Maj. David Secord's home — when it doesn't work").

In the latter half of last year, Hummel Properties came forward with a proposal to save this historic property that had been tied up for years in negotiation with the developer who owned the property and associated lands.

This overture was widely applauded by the residents of St. Davids and many heritage invested citizens

across NOTL.

On multiple occasions, Hummel represented that they would weather-in the Secord building — specifically rebuilding the roof, which they stated was critical to preserve it from further deterioration during the winter.

Unfortunately, a visit to the top of Paxton Lane this winter seems to make it clear that we got diddly-squat — not even the very cheap address of tarping the building as a temporary address to winter protection.

Now, the proponent may wish to claim that the town's slow approval processes (relative only to the proposed subdivision) stymied the original timeline for reconstruction, but that excuse doesn't preclude something like tarping — an action that would have shown commitment toward preserving the historic structure.

Which leaves us to wonder: is the Secord House simply a sacrificial pawn in the game?

Moving on to other news, the legal challenge launched by NOTL resident and ethical developer, Nicholas Colaneri — alleging the town failed to follow proper planning and heritage rules with respect to the Shaw Festival's applications around the Royal George



Brian Marshall says the David Secord House could have been better protected over the winter with tarping.

— came before the court on Feb. 26.

While no decision was rendered, apparently the justice concluded there was legal merit to the challenge, pushing the hearing forward to a future date (anticipated to be within a month) and granted a four-week continuance of the stay on the property vis-à-vis the theatre and ticket office.

Of course, should the hearing not occur within the next four weeks, another continuance of the stay will be in order, pending said hearing and the court's subsequent decision on the matter.

Apparently, while the Shaw Festival can flex its

muscle to influence the town's decision-making process, the judicial system moves to its own priorities and schedule.

We'll continue to watch as the matter unfolds.

Shifting now to the region, in last week's meeting a majority of members of council (with the notable exceptions of members from St. Catharines, Niagara Falls and Welland — all of whom would see their political reach expand significantly after amalgamation) voted in favour of placing some controls around Ford's appointed chair, Bob Gale, and his autocratic move towards ramming the amalgamation agenda down the

throats of Niagara voters.

Specifically, the council directed Gale "to refrain from any further action and utilization of any further regional resources or staff time ... in connection with a review of regional governance or municipal amalgamation."

Further, they voted to initiate a review of the regional government operations to identify and address duplication and inefficiencies based on hard data, financial analysis while soliciting public input.

It's interesting that this vote came hot on the heels of Ford's statements regarding amalgamation stating, "If it's going to go, then it has to be from Niagara by Niagara. It has to have the approvals from the majority of mayors, it has to have approval from the majority of elected officials," and continued by suggesting that "hopefully 70 to 80 per cent of the population agree" making the implication that the public should be consulted and their opinions would have weight.

That's an interesting stance from someone who has historically pushed for amalgamation, but then again, Ford apparently has never seen the research which unequivocally shows there is no financial benefit

to doing so (saying "I've never seen that" in response to a question regarding such last Wednesday).

That said, Gale seems to have taken a page directly from the premier's playbook because he didn't have any facts or data to support his position either.

Thank God for Fort Erie Mayor Wayne Redekop and the majority of councillors who voted in favour of simple things, like facts, data and proper financial analysis.

Hopefully, logic will continue to prevail and the governance review will be conducted by a professional firm with a long track record of specializing in auditing organizations with the intent of re-engineering to achieve efficiencies and higher levels of performance.

Goodness knows, in its current form, the regional government seems to be a bottomless hole into which taxpayers continually pour money and receive few practical benefits from having done so.

Think of the proposed roundabout in St. Davids as an example ... just sayin'.

Brian Marshall is a NOTL realtor, author and expert consultant on architectural design, restoration and heritage.

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ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson
Columnist

It was the perfect way to turn down the temperature in Niagara. To soften the disrespect, and sometimes lack of civility, which seem to be present in our self centred and amalgamated Niagara-on-the-Lake. Don't forget, we used to be several smaller towns. So was St. Catharines. And not that long ago.

Let's all take a deep breath.

I read and I eavesdrop, but I don't participate in social media. So, my worldview is somewhat narrow. By choice, and by default.

A group of friends drove 20 minutes to Laura Secord Secondary School in St. Catharines to enjoy "Les Miserables" last Saturday

evening. For a total change of pace.

As a parent of two former Secord students, who between them performed in four great Secord musicals, last Saturday evening was certainly a trip down memory lane. The sometimes misunderstood high school students were waiting for us, after many months of rehearsing and working with director and drama teacher Chris Baker.

As well as the principal performers, actors and ensemble, so many other students and staff members are part of these musical triumphs every second year. It would be unfair to name any of them, but let me take a brief stab:

The creative team, the student crews for costumes, hair, makeup, backstage, sound and spotlights, front of house, videography, the set, including stage design and props, and the set construction crew.

This is the 60th year of Secord musicals, so about 30 different shows have been staged. Chapeaux, hats off, and the biggest of big bravos to everyone who has been involved over the years.



Ross Robinson writes that the student actors in Laura Secord's production of "Les Miserables" were excellent.

Thousands of people, and even more thousands of parents and siblings, are proud members of "the Secord musical family."

Big bucks had been spent this year for the rights to present the "school edition" of "Les Miserables." Just imagine the complex legalities and hoops.

On the cover of the impressive playbill, it was noted that the school edition was specially adapted and licensed by Music Theatre International and Cameron Mackintosh (Overseas) Limited. Had a dreaded tariff been paid?

But I digress. Let me get back to rambling about "Les Miserables" last weekend at

Secord. Sharp and eclectic, if that's the right word, students were on the job, welcoming us and getting everyone to their seats for a sold out show. Professional pictures of the cast by Secord alum Robert Nowell in the lobby. Exciting.

An amazing number of Secord staff members were helping out. Enthusiastically, and proud to be a part of the Secord musical again this year. May I ask, how does a relatively small high school, in a relatively small city, do it every second year? The talent, all the other components. This is a major league triumph.

The musical version of

"Les Miserables," based on the novel by Victor Hugo, has been around a long time. Since 1985. Many of us have seen it. Often numerous times.

How would Secord do with the school edition? In a word, they did great.

Jean Valjean, Inspector Javert, Fantine, Eponine, Cosette and the other principals. The ensemble. Everyone involved with this year's Secord musical. The acting, the voices, the choreography, the technical aspects.

And a special shout out for the costumes! Over thirty actors, many with multiple costumes.

I am in no way qualified

to comment on anything theatrical. At the same time, I have some background in show business, so let me summarize. Secord musicals are always great. And the tradition continues.

"Les Miserables," school edition, will thrill and inspire you. We can all benefit from an evening like this.

Thank you, Ms. K. Sacco, Principal at Laura Secord Secondary School. And yes, Mr. Baker, we hear the people sing.

The show runs until Sunday, March 8, closing with a 2 p.m. matinee. Do yourselves a favour and check it out..

rossrocket9@gmail.com

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A tale of two towns: What local government means to democracy



Keith McNenly
Special to The Lake Report

Once again, Premier Doug Ford bemoans the number of politicians in Niagara and has a simplistic solution to the perceived problem: get rid of the towns and cities.

Small-town politics, though, is different from his personal political experience and I don't think the premier gets the extent of the difference.

Local government exists as the smallest expression of democracy available to citizens in a free society. Local citizens can be a hindrance to the aspirations of developers and the brand of politics that feeds their coffers, and so there is conflict.

Southern Ontario is one of the most acute examples of the successes and failures of unfettered growth. In a microcosm, Niagara-on-the-Lake is a study in the never ending conflict between citizens and developers.

The ultimate form of the ensuing compromise between homeowners interests; heritage and environmental preservation, resource protection, versus the interests of developers,

depends upon the political colours of the flag currently unfurled over Queen's Park. Conservative governments are generally pro-development and facilitators of developers projects.

Most developers would prefer a comfy sofa instead of the hot seat in a local council chamber, facing the actual people who have been volunteered to live beside their latest enterprise. That's actually a good thing. Sending out bulldozers should never be easy.

The problem is the mindset. Citizens are not the enemy. If citizens are the enemy, then democracy is the enemy, because citizens are the true and only representation of democracy.

More than 50 years ago, I became chief administrative officer in a small municipality on the opposite side of Lake Ontario, similar in many ways to NOTL; rural in nature with a citizenry that had a perspective on the importance of their local community within the larger picture.

You can't truly appreciate and advocate for a place so much as the folks who actually live there. Diluting their voice is effective for development at the detriment stewardship.

Niagara-on-the-Lake and its unique future potential was not on our communities radar. The equally important nature of my former community, called the Town of Mono, was just as far



Keith McNenly, former CAO of the Town of Mono, says there are a lot of similarities between it and NOTL.

from the mind of NOTLers. At the time, we knew NOTL as a place that grew Concord grapes for juice, peaches and cherries.

If the NOTL countryside had given way to subdivisions like Mississauga did, also a prime agricultural region, the evolution to vinerous grapes and the now nationally important wine region might never have happened.

The unique soils of a prehistoric massive lake and a climate regulated by the surrounding Great Lakes make this community unique. Additionally, our historic nation-building heritage is unparalleled in Canada.

My former community had none of these characteristics, but has its own unique importance to the fabric of southern Ontario.

Mono is the headwaters of four major river systems feeding lakes Ontario and Erie to the south and Georgian Bay/Lake Huron to the north and west. That

community deflected the proliferation of rural subdivision development, instead championing environmental preservation. It held national-level conferences about fresh water and started a new tourism region called Headwaters Country to help spread awareness and consolidate the sustainability ethic.

Just like in NOTL, it fell upon the locals to recognize the special importance of their community, to advocate for preservation of its natural and built heritage, and to vigorously take on its stewardship; in short, to resist shortsighted development proposals, which it successfully did.

My reason for telling you about this is to illustrate that the two communities, separated by a couple hundred kilometres, are more alike than different in that it was the local inhabitants who recognized the underlying value of their environment and the need to preserve it for the future.

Unspoiled clean clear water from the protected streams and aquifers of Mono feed into the Niagara River that flows alongside our entire community.

Premier Ford extols a repetitive mantra about the need to reduce the number of local politicians. I agree, in part.

There is no need to have nine members of local council and I would suggest that as few as five could adequately represent our community, so let's talk about a change. Having one or two representatives on a "Niagara City" council is a less desirable solution.

Our five-person council north of Toronto consisted of an assortment of farmers and other community members. They are what Premier Ford calls "politicians." In the thankless job on local council, with meagre compensation, they were really citizen volunteers.

Here is an anecdote to illustrate.

A troop of officials in Queen's Park arranged to meet the head of council and CAO to advise us of a drastically new zoning bureaucracy called the Niagara Escarpment Commission.

On the morning of the meeting, the reeve (now called mayor) called the town office saying he had to skip the meeting because he had a cow that was having trouble birthing and she needed his help. This was before cell phones, so his

absence couldn't be conveyed to the visitors until they arrived.

I asked him if he has any specific message for the dozen provincial directors and staff about to arrive, and he said to just "tell them that I have a cow having trouble giving birth, and she needs my help, so I'll have to miss the meeting."

The meeting took place and it was then left to us to figure out where to put the half-dozen new file cabinets we would need for the latest provincial incursion into local government.

Democracy, and especially democracy at the closest and most local level, is community members representing community members. These men and women aren't "politicians" of the ilk perceived by Premier Ford, with offices in glass palaces and numerous staff.

They are, for the most part, just neighbours working from kitchen tables, wanting to give back to their community — when we make the wrong choices, we get to have a do-over in four years.

A lot of snow has been scraped off the roads since that meeting. More importantly, I can report that mother-cow and calf had a successful delivery — that's local politics, too.

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

Amalgamation is redistribution, not reform

Dear editor:

The conversation around amalgamation deserves honest language. What is being proposed under the four-city model is not governance reform — it is the redistribution of a well-run community's resources to subsidize the failures of another.

Niagara-on-the-Lake is one of the most fiscally disciplined municipalities in the region. We run lean, maintain our infrastructure and manage our budget responsibly. Niagara Falls, by its own mayor's admission, carries a \$110-million infrastructure deficit and water and wastewater

systems that are 50 per cent poor or failing.

Merging these two realities doesn't fix anything. It forces NOTL taxpayers to absorb costs they had no part in creating, governed by a council where our 19,000 residents would be permanently outvoted by Niagara Falls' 100,000.

The dysfunction that regional chair Gale has rightly identified, red tape, duplication, ballooning tax increases, originates at the regional tier, not at our town hall. Amalgamating lower-tier municipalities does not solve regional-level problems. It punishes the

communities that have been doing things right.

Any government that values fiscal responsibility should reward good management, not penalize it. Any government that believes in local autonomy should trust communities closest to the ground. Any government that champions accountability should strengthen representation, not dilute it. Forced amalgamation moves in the opposite direction on all counts.

NOTL's identity is not sentimental, it is economic. Our heritage district, wine country, agricultural lands

and the Shaw Festival generate significant tourism revenue precisely because local leaders have had the authority to protect them. Under an amalgamated council dominated by Niagara Falls' priorities, those assets face development pressures from interests that do not share ours.

Residents should look beyond the promise of a simple democratic majority and recognize what this truly represents: the dilution of NOTL's small population into a Niagara Falls municipality that has its own significant problems and is effectively



Matthew Lush writes that amalgamation isn't a cost saving tool, it's a money redistribution tool that could harm small communities like Niagara-on-the-Lake.

looking to solve them by absorbing ours.

Niagara-on-the-Lake is not the problem. We should

not be asked to pay as though we are.

Matthew Lush
NOTL



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Take it from me, amalgamation has **no advantages**

Richard Connelly
Special to The Lake Report

We lived in West Carleton Township, a rural municipality on the west side of the City of Ottawa adjacent to Kanata. There were several small towns in our township, including Carp, Dunrobin, Kinburn, Constance Bay and many clustered areas of residential development along the Ottawa River and in the hills around Carp.

The City of Ottawa was poorly run for decades and was incapable of the management of their infrastructure. Roads, sewers, sewage treatment, water treatment and supply, storm water system management, storm sewers and general lack of maintenance of services in the city were numerous issues that led to local increased taxation and reflected their inability to comprehensively maintain infrastructure.

Combined sewers (sanitary combined with storm rainfall) are still in operation in the core, causing overloading of many of the sewage treatment facilities. The City of Ottawa was in



Richard Connelly writes that amalgamation has a history of silencing the voices of smaller communities that inevitably end up with less representation. MIDJOURNEY

dire need of new sources of income through taxation and development charges.

Amalgamation affected many of the smaller and rural municipalities, causing a significant increase in residential and commercial taxes. The rural areas lost all contact with their elected officials. West Carleton Township had approximately 10 elected members

of our original council. The revised organization left us with one elected official.

Our ability to influence the operations in our municipality was reduced to almost zero. Our well-run municipality lost all control of our well managed infrastructure and our reserve funds.

The city initiated amalgamation for all of the

municipalities in the greater Ottawa area. The process took three years, and more than \$3 million, according to Albert Bowers, the former reeve of Osgoode Township, was spent on the integration process. The well-run municipalities with reserve funds suffered under the new government.

The city benefitted from the assumption of the reserve funds, and the local municipalities suffered from the significant existing debt of the City of Ottawa. Ottawa was notorious for carrying a huge debt and the poor state of their infrastructure.

I was recently working for a land development client on a residential subdivision adjacent to Almonte, Ont. The City of Ottawa had spread to within about a 10-minute drive from the edge of the town of Almonte.

The local advantage of the home builders was the cost of building permits. In Almonte, permits were \$20,000 less than in the City of Ottawa. Almonte was a bedroom community with lower taxes and lower infrastructure costs.

The amalgamated City

of Ottawa had many capital works projects while we lived in Manotick (in the former Township of Rideau). The history of the capital works projects, with few exceptions, was significant overruns of construction budgets, work not being completed on time, regular replacement of contractors and major disruption to communities.

The current and mostly inoperable transit system is another typical major project that is well over budget and years of past due on completion. The management of this project by Ottawa is a complete disaster.

In our last two years in Manotick, and to show how desperate Ottawa was for new sources of income, the City of Ottawa had circulated letters to rural homeowners (who rely on private water and sewage systems) indicating the intent to place meters on private wells with monthly service charges for water to be paid to the city.

The rural owners successfully objected to this illogical tax, but the next round was an intended tariff for storm water management.

No one really understood

this new tax. The scenario was if you had a ditch or drainage system in front of your home, that tariff would be charged for that service.

There were no local signs of additional maintenance work in Manotick provided by the city. The tariff was applied and has been issued for several years. This was somewhat like the tariff situation with the U.S. — no benefit and a higher cost of living.

There will be no advantage for amalgamation within adjacent municipalities to NOTL. We have a special place on this earth and we need to focus on maintaining and protecting our unique community.

Amalgamation with local adjacent municipalities with failing infrastructure will result in higher cost of living, more taxes and less service.

That is clearly evident from the example of the City of Ottawa and the severe impact on the rural residents in the Ottawa area.

Richard Connelly is a Niagara-on-the-Lake resident and the past owner of an engineering firm in Ottawa.

We need amalgamation to deal with **infrastructure shortfalls**

Dear editor:

A lot of people are very upset with the undemocratic amalgamation proposal.

An analysis of the situation seems to leave little choice for Bob Gale and the provincial government, but to move towards trimming government expenses through amalgamation, capitalizing on Niagara Region's competitive advantages to generate additional revenue streams, expediting the required decision-making (by eliminating the negotiations for votes between regional councillors for goods and services in their geographical area) by moving the processes of economic expansion faster, and to create a more democratic rule of government.

It's about government running more like an efficient business and being fiscally prudent, not the maintenance of excessive governmental oversight.

The region needs \$2.7 billion to fund an infrastructure that has deteriorated to the point where it has exceeded or will be close to exceeding its useful life.

Real estate developments, both residential and commercial, have increased the

population base and made the existing infrastructure obsolete. Councils over the years have been pushing core infrastructure costs into the future — their bad.

It's acknowledged that the property taxes required to fund the infrastructure shortfalls are on an unsustainable upward trajectory. Are we prepared to absorb the increases in property taxes?

There has been revenue generated over the years from the real estate developments. These revenue sources appear to be significantly inadequate, leaving municipalities in a situation where they have to approve more real estate developments to keep up with their infrastructure requirements — much like an approval treadmill that eventually results in financial exhaustion.

Real estate developers have become wealthy, leaving taxpayers with an infrastructure liability that has to be primarily paid from our property taxes.

And then there is the forgiveness of a nearly \$1-million fee for the Parliament Oak hotel, or the estimated \$10 million for the unwanted and really unnecessary St. Davids roundabout that

could be routed to more urgent needs.

It's been touted that amalgamation would reduce the costs of running the Niagara Region by an estimated \$250 million over 10 years.

We do know that the existing governing structure is bloated. There are 126 municipally elected officials in the Niagara Region, more than the number of members of provincial parliament in the entire province.

Organizational restructuring needs to occur to streamline operational functionality and hopefully optimize costs. In 2024, the City of Niagara Falls had 161 employees on the Ontario Sunshine List (salaries over \$100,000), while Niagara-on-the-Lake had 29 people.

The NOTL chief administrative officer earns well over \$200,000. There are 13 chief administrative officers in the region. These two municipalities are only a portion of the total 12 distinct local municipalities in Niagara Region. There are efficiencies to be had.

The Fraser Institute study is cited as evidence that amalgamation doesn't work, but that study is antiquated, the municipalities reviewed

have non-comparable attributes, and we are assuming that the government hasn't learned from previous governmental stumbles. These municipalities didn't seem to have a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure problem.

Amalgamation, I believe, is a component of a broader provincial economic strategic plan that recognizes the Niagara region and the provincial government are underutilizing the revenue generating capacity of Niagara Region.

While I have no specific insight, it is conceivable that the 1,000 acres located on the closed Marineland property could be purchased by the province/investors for development as part of the establishment of an alternative destination to Las Vegas.

Caesars in Vegas utilizes 83 acres, which means that potentially 10 casinos could be built on that site. The Venetian in Vegas, for example employs roughly 8,500 individuals and has roughly 7,000 suites.

Part of the Marineland property could also be allocated for much-needed affordable housing to accommodate not only casino employees but others in the area that require

affordable housing.

Just one casino would generate significant positive economic multiplier effects: increased demand for local housing and the correlated need for local builders to build them, transportation in the form of potentially increased local car sales/leases, incremental personal and business tax increases from the new casino attributable to the regional/provincial/federal governments, increased tourism which, in turn, would increase local businesses' ability to generate more profits, and possibly a new international airport for international and/or domestic travellers.

Rather than Canadians going to Vegas, they would come to Niagara. This is going to pay for the infrastructure shortfalls, and it needs to be done quickly in an efficient consolidated governmental structure.

A lot of people have cited the lack of democracy in Mr. Gale's approach and are revolting at having the provincial government's ability to consolidate without public/political consultation.

In a democracy, each person has a vote and is equally represented. At regional

council meetings, each representative (i.e. each 12 mayors, each 18 regional councillors, and the regional chair) has an equal vote.

However, for example, Fort Erie and St. Catharines have different populations — how can they each have an equal vote when their voter bases are so vastly different?

Where's the representation by population democratic ideal? It's not democratic. The entire Niagara regional government could be elected in a separate simplified electoral process by all the voters of Niagara Region.

If there are fears of losing the historical character of NOTL (which many people believe is happening under the existing mayor's/council's tenure anyway), then negotiate with the province for its preservation in the amalgamation process. Take a more constructive consultative approach to alleviate the potential adverse effects of amalgamation.

Amalgamation should happen.

How will we be represented and who will it be in the upcoming Oct. 26 municipal elections?

*Gienek Ksiazkiewicz
St. Davids*



Let's end amalgamation contemplation and **look at facts**



David Israelson
Special to The Lake Report

Would amalgamation be good for Niagara-on-the-Lake or would it be awful? There's probably a good answer to this, but we're not likely to find out from the troublesome and noisy debate triggered by Niagara's regional chair, who was appointed, not elected, to his position.

Bob Gale has been rightly slapped down by his own fellow regional council members, after he wrote to the provincial government and 12 regional mayors calling for a top-down reassessment of whether Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara's other towns and cities should continue to exist.

He said he was "deeply contemplating" smashing Niagara into one or four larger cities, which would certainly mean the offi-

cial end of Canada's most beautiful town.

Who asked him? Certainly not our own Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa or our council — both have spoken out loudly, and for a change, unequivocally, against the idea. The regional council has spoken, too, passing a motion calling on Gale to cease and desist and to not use taxpayer-funded staff time for his thinly disguised amalgamation campaign.

Regional council also voted sensibly to conduct its own review of local government services, seeking to determine whether there are areas where there is duplication or inefficiency.

Going through actual facts rather than "contemplation" may determine that amalgamation would be terrible for our town and others in the region. But it may also find areas that can be improved or streamlined, without destroying small-town life.

To be fair, amalgamation may be bad for us, but it is not always an objectively bad idea. For example, New York City amalgamated successfully in 1898.

It's fashionable also to think that amalgamation is



David Israelson argues that land-use decisions should remain in the hands of local governments — which was the province's stated objective when it transferred that authority away from the region in the first place. While he acknowledges there may be opportunities to reduce duplication, he says doing so requires careful consideration, proper study and a thorough process of gathering information.

simply a blunt instrument deployed by bossy senior governments, like Premier Doug Ford's, which has obliterated a wide swath of Ontario's planning, conservation and environmental laws.

But this is not always so; in the 1980s, the uber-bossy former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher wiped out the Greater London Council, leaving smaller local councils intact

(London-wide government was later restored).

It makes sense, therefore, for us in Niagara to look at whether there are situations where residents are needlessly paying taxes or have to seek approvals from two governments instead of one.

But it should be made clear to whoever is tasked with reviewing this that this does not necessarily mean considering amalgamation. If you sometimes

buy milk from the supermarket and sometimes from the convenience store, it does not mean that one or the other should be shut down.

Bob Lehman, a highly respected urban planner whose work includes assisting the Niagara Foundation, points out that there are some things that a regional government can do well, while others are best left in local hands.

"Since land use decisions are all close to home and they impact peoples' daily lives, they should be made by a local authority," he says.

He added in an email that in fact, this is one reason that the province actually took away planning authority from all regional governments.

"Putting it back there does not make sense [which could happen under amalgamation]," he said. In fact, it might be better for NOTL if planning was even more local than it is now, with a separate planning authority just for our historic Old Town.

At the same time, there are services, such as policing and perhaps also water and sewers that could be handled on a regional basis. This is why we set up bodies such as police service boards or utility commissions.

By all means, let's look at what kind of government works best for our town and region. But let's put seat-of-the-pants amalgamation contemplation to rest.

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

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The **oxymoron** of political transparency

Dear editor:
As we fast approach the municipal election cycle, expect our elected officials to dust off their tired, old, scripted and repetitive stump speeches. Political puffery on steroids.
Over the years, my favourite election oxymoron has been:

“honest politician.” My newest saying has been the subject of much debate and frustration within our community during multiple councils — too many to remember.
No doubt their redundant cliché will be reiterated by every candidate using the same old hackneyed buzz-

words when running for office — namely: “If elected, I will govern ethically and with utmost transparency.” The oxymoron is: “political transparency.”
Have we all not experienced over the years the complete lack of transparency? For example and most

recently, Garth Turner’s attempt to get the new Shaw theatre trucking schedule, and our Chautauqua residents blindsided by the beach property sale considerations — nothing changes.
Samuel A. Young
NOTL

Quiet pickleball equipment could offer a solution

Dear editor:
I read with dismay that pickleball is once again prohibited due to noise complaints (“Noise issues

sideline pickleball again,” Feb. 26). Sound barriers failed to resolve the issue.
A quick search on Amazon found quiet pickleballs

that act in the same manner as the loud plastic ones, and quiet paddles as well.
Would this not allow players to enjoy the wonder-

ful courts and placate the offended residents?
It may be that simple.
Vic Klassen
St. Catharines

Let the **residents decide** if we have too many councillors

Dear editor:
Unfortunately, too many politicians mistake anecdotes, talking points and simple conclusions without providing any factual backup as expressing an argument. Luckily, regional council has decided to require an evidence-based approach to the amalgamation question.

What Regional Chair Bob Gale fails to recognize is that, from a taxation standpoint, Niagara Region generally operates as an

amalgamated entity. In looking at my 2025 municipal tax bill, 63 per cent went to the operations of the region and 12.5 per cent went to the regional educational levy. The remaining 24.5 per cent went to the operations of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Is he arguing that if the town operations were absorbed into the regional budget that there would be cost savings on the services provided to the residents of NOTL?

He and the premier keep harping on the overall number of local and regional politicians in Niagara. Surely it is up to the residents of NOTL to decide whether the number of local councillors is excessive since their remuneration comes from the town’s portion of the tax bill.

As well, the mayor of Niagara Falls has come out in support of the four municipality solution to governance. Is this because he anticipates that NOTL’s huge tax base could be

looked to shore up the finances of Niagara Falls? Would he be as gung ho if NOTL was joined to St. Catharines, both being entities below the escarpment?

Although I don’t believe the residents of NOTL get value for money through our present form of regional government, the present mix provides a middle position that respects the differences that the various municipalities making up the region now enjoy.
Ron Fritz
Queenston

Tourism

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Have some fun



Across

- 1. Gazes fixedly (6)
- 5. Chair (8)
- 9. Preliminary test (5,3)
- 10. Person of no influence (6)
- 11. Inability to sleep (8)
- 12. Soak up (6)
- 16. Easter bloom (4)
- 18. Young horses (5)
- 22. Audacious person (5)
- 23. Bicoloured (3-4)
- 24. Cry of approval (5)
- 25. Inward feeling (5)
- 28. Augury (4)
- 32. Species of goose (6)
- 35. Repair (8)
- 36. Intrude upon (6)
- 37. Septic (8)
- 38. Tavern (8)
- 39. Hair curler (6)

Down

- 2. Capital of Ontario (7)
- 3. Computer information (4-3)
- 4. Beach (6)
- 5. Instruction book (6)
- 6. Tooth-related (6)
- 7. Garments (5)
- 8. Elizabeth I was the last (5)
- 13. Computer memory units (5)
- 14. Periodical (5)
- 15. Dumb vessel (5)
- 17. Actor-singer --- Novello (4)
- 18. Like zirconia (5)
- 19. Get to know (5)
- 20. Brooked (5)
- 21. Exude slowly (4)
- 26. Moral (7)
- 27. Sleep (4-3)
- 29. Capital of Lesotho (6)
- 30. Beginner (6)
- 31. Spliff (6)
- 33. Invalidate (5)
- 34. Embarrass (5)

Crossword Puzzle

1	2		3		4		5		6		7		8	
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Last issue's answers

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	R	E														
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	A	I														
24	P	R	I	V	E	T		26	B	A	R	N	Y	A	R	D
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	B															
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	8											9	2	1	



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EXPLORING HISTORY
WITH NOTL MUSEUM



Harrison's Hardware Store

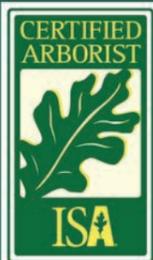
William Harrison and his three sons operated a hardware store from this building and property on Queen Street. In addition to supplying locals with gardening, fishing and home improvement goods, those who grew up in town during this time remember playing in the lumber yard at the rear of the property as children. After the newspaper the Niagara Times ceased publication, its printing press was moved here. From this building, Harrison went on to establish the Niagara Advance, printing the newspaper's first editions right here. E. H. Brennan was later brought in to run the newspaper. He eventually purchased the business and its equipment and relocated the Advance to another building on Queen Street. If you're having trouble picturing where this building once stood, it's because it was later demolished and replaced by the post office. While this building is no longer here, the site still has connections to community news. Many readers of The Lake Report await their printed editions in their post office boxes.



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Humanity's evolution may come with a bit of editing



DR. BROWN

Dr. William Brown
Columnist

Last week's task was to summarize in a few hundred words the evolution of humans which began six to seven million years ago and continues to the present.

The path began with a variety of small ape-like species, which became increasingly bipedal over four to five million years before transitioning to increasingly larger brained, fully bipedal species variants, some of which, like homo erectus, migrated throughout Eurasia including Britain as well as within Africa.

The story wrapped up with our two cousin species, the denisovans in Asia and neanderthals in Europe before anatomically and possibly behaviorally modern humans appeared in what

is now Morocco as early as 300,000 years ago.

Along the evolutionary path, there were many transitional species, some side show species such as homo floresiensis, homo luzonensis and homo naledi, and periods when two or more variants lived at the same time and even region, if not quite the same habitat, until in the last 30,000 years, when one species remained — us.

Adding to the number of species variants are those known only by the DNA they left behind and others yet to discovered or lost forever.

The evolutionary path to modern humans was never a certainty. For example, there have been near-extinction events such as the eruption of Mount Toba in Indonesia 70,000 years ago, and far worse, nearly a million years ago, when the total population of prehumans plummeted from almost one million to less than 3,000 in the face of prolonged harsh climate and so remained for the following 100,000 years before recovering.

Even so, prior to humans settling down 10,000 years ago, estimates of the worldwide population of modern humans world are small



Dr. Brown says it's a matter of time before the wealthiest among us can modify their children's genomes to select various traits — a scary thought.

— somewhere between one and 10 million total scattered in small groups.

The latter made them more vulnerable in the face of sustained severe weather, lack of food and as was the case for the neanderthals, led to their extinction because of inbreeding and the accompanying accumulation of harmful genetic variants as happened to other species such as woolly mammoths.

From the beginning, the path to modern humans was never scripted because of the important role natural selection and chance play in the evolution of most species including our own, and the corollary that any rerun of hominin evolution would most unlikely come up with

a species quite like our own.

Of course, as much as evolution might not come up with a species as clever as us, there's always the possibility that another run at evolution might have come up with species far more clever and hopefully wiser than ours.

Which brings me to this question — what does the future hold for our species?

Predicting the future for our species is dicey given current world politics, economics and climate change, but predicting the far future is more certain.

For example, glacial and interglacial periods will continue to cycle every 100,000 years much as they have for the last several few million years, because the cycle is dictated by cyclic changes in the orbit of the earth about the sun.

On a much longer scale, in three to four billion years, our sun will likely have run through enough of its hydrogen and gravitational force to expand and engulf Earth and possibly even Mars, roasting both and killing off all life on Earth.

How do we know that? From observation of similar fates for similar sized

stars and extrapolating to what's likely to happen with our sun.

But what about our species? What's our future? If the past is prologue to the future, we are likely to continue to evolve, indeed, as genetic studies suggest.

But so far there's little, if any, evidence that human intelligence has changed within the last several thousand years or that there have been noticeable changes in physique except for whatever improvements have taken place through better health.

The collective fossil evidence suggests that for much our history few lived much beyond their 30s; such were the risks of predators, hunting large dangerous animals, unpredictable food sources, and clashes within and between bands.

Whether we evolve into another species as many of our predecessor species did is hard to predict. The evolution of a menagerie of hominin variants to humans took several million years and was based on genetic changes in far fewer humans than the eight million and counting humans living now.

Based on those numbers, there should be many more

mutational changes in the modern human genome than in the past and, given that mixing of humans has become common, those changes stand a much better chance of becoming widely incorporated in the human genome raising the possibility of budding future species not in several hundred years, but much earlier.

What's coming is editing our genome to enhance desired cognitive, physical and health-enhancing genes. The tools exist now for editing a few genes but editing the many related genes necessary to enhance specific traits is several decades away.

When that time comes, humans with the financial resources and connections may seek advantages for themselves and their children through modifying their own genes and those of their children.

What a frightening prospect.

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.

NOTL nut farmer goes to South Korea for **international expo**

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Linda Grimo has spent much of her life farming in Niagara-on-the-Lake and working at Grimo Nut Nursery on Lakeshore Road, where she has grown and sold nut trees since 1999.

Even with decades of experience with chestnuts and other nuts, she called her February trip to South Korea “up there” among the highlights of her career.

From Feb. 3 to 10, Grimo visited South Korea, including Feb. 4 to 6 in Gongju City for the Korea International Chestnut Expo.

The trip began after she met a City of Gongju employee who visited her farm last July. She said he was bilingual in English and Korean and was sent to learn more about her operation.

“He came to the farm and saw what we do with chestnuts,” said Grimo. “We do sell Korean chestnuts, we



Linda Grimo, owner of Grimo Nut Nursery, left, with chestnut expert Amy Miller. The two both spoke at the Korea International Chestnut Expo in February. Grimo spoke about the history of American chestnuts, which have withstood multiple disease waves. SUPPLIED

grow the trees, we sell the trees, and they’re disease-resistant.”

“He was thrilled with that.”

Soon after he returned home, Grimo received an invitation to attend the 2026 festival — she accepted.

She travelled to the conference with Amy Miller of Route 9 Cooperative in the United States, who holds a PhD focused on chestnut disease and whom Grimo has known for more than 20 years. Miller spoke about

chestnuts in the eastern United States.

Other speakers included Francesca Gioacchini of Italy, who presented on “Italian chestnut excellence,” and Sashichi Sakurai of Japan.

Grimo’s presentation, “Growing Chestnuts in Canada: Progress Through Perseverance,” focused on the recovery of chestnuts in North America after widespread disease.

She said chestnuts are native to southern Ontario,

where American chestnuts once dominated. In the early 1900s, Chinese chestnut trees were introduced to the United States as landscape trees. They carried a disease to which they were immune, but American chestnuts were not, devastating the species. The outbreak began at the Bronx Zoo.

“These forests were dotted with tree stumps because there was no resistance,” she said. “It’s a terribly sad story of disease

introduced into North America.”

Efforts to restore the now-endangered American chestnut continue, but the work is difficult, she said. Farmers have tried developing hybrid Chinese-American chestnuts to improve disease resistance.

Additional threats have emerged, including chestnut weevil, which has affected some southern Ontario growers, and the Asian gall wasp, which has significantly damaged Grimo’s trees.

“We seem to get through one thing and then bam,” she said, noting she grows Korean chestnuts, which are more resistant to gall wasp.

Grimo said Chinese, Korean and American chestnuts are all edible varieties, unlike horse chestnuts.

“When you hear the ‘chestnuts roasting on an open fire,’ that’s what they’re talking about,” she said.

In South Korea, she was struck by how deeply chestnuts are woven into daily

life. Gongju City sits in a major chestnut-producing region, and she encountered the nut throughout her trip.

“Even on the airplane, I was eating a Korean stew and it had a chestnut in it,” she said. “Chestnuts were in the pizza as a topping.”

Grimo said she experienced warmth and hospitality throughout her visit and plans to return for the 2028 expo.

“There was such a warm, kind energy from everywhere we went,” she said.

She hopes to continue contributing to global knowledge about nuts. She views chestnuts, walnuts and hazelnuts as essential crops worldwide, valued for food, wildlife and wood.

“When you talk about a real-world crop, you’re talking about chestnuts, walnuts, hazelnuts,” she said.

“Those crops are grown in major parts of the world and are important parts of their diet, and in wildlife and in everything else.”

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Newark Neighbours Announces Retirement of Cindy Grant and Appointment of Interim Food Bank Manager

Newark Neighbours announces that, after many years of dedicated service and hard work, Cindy Grant has decided to retire from her volunteer role with the organization.

Cindy has been an instrumental part of the Newark Neighbours team, diligently working toward the success and growth of Newark Neighbours over the past several years. Through times of change and increasing community need, she helped strengthen Food Bank operations and supported the broader mission of the organization, always keeping the well-being of clients, volunteers, and donors at the heart of every decision. Her contributions have left a lasting and positive impact on the organization and the community it serves.

We sincerely thank Cindy for her years of service and wish her all the very best in this new chapter.

In her place, Genevieve Lawrence has been appointed as Interim Food Bank Manager, effective immediately. Genevieve brings valuable experience to the role, having been a dedicated member of the Food Bank team for the past several years. Her familiarity with daily operations, volunteers, and client services will help ensure a smooth and seamless transition during this period.

Newark Neighbours remains committed to serving the Niagara-on-the-Lake community with compassion, care and concern.



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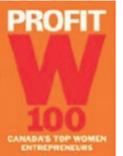


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- Long term presence in Niagara-on-the-Lake. **Local Right at Home Realty Team Office in NOTL** (Over 6000 in GTA, #1 independent brokerage in the GTA for 10 years**)
- Angelika previously owned a highly successful marketing/media business in Toronto for over 20 years. Built relationships with Fortune 500, big banks, CTV, Global, Olympics, Film Festival.
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INSULATED 6 CAR HEATED GARAGE, EV CHARGER, WORKSHOP INCLUDING BATHROOM, PLUS 2ND LEVEL. EXTRA 3000 SQFT!

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*Based on reviews from Rate-My-Agent.com, a triple verified review platform **TRREB Jan. 1, 2013 to Dec. 31, 2022, combined units sold.

FREE GIFT OF 10 HOURS OF PACKING AND DECLUTTERING SERVICES - excludes tenanted areas *Based on closed transactions in the Burlington / Niagara Right At Home Realty Office, 2022, 2023, 2024