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The Lake Report



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



An icewine village | Page 4

January 22, 2026



Corey Patey carries a load of icewine grapes.

Students brave cold for icewine harvest

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

It's 7:30 a.m. on a Friday. Niagara-on-the-Lake was just hit with a huge snow-storm the day before, but on this day, the weather is calm, sitting at around -11 C with a light wind.

The sun is rising over Niagara College's teaching winery, where dozens of students are huddled among the vineyards, readying for their first harvest of the year.

They'll be picking frozen Vidal grapes that, through an elaborate process of pressing, fermentation and aging, will be made into

Continued on Page 5

Wolves howl at Winter Classic

Parents and volunteers help make annual tournament another success



NOTL Wolves goalie Colton Ferguson stops a Lucan Irish player on a breakaway during the Winter Classic U9 Tournament that took place at the Meridian Credit Union arena in Virgil over the weekend. The Wolves defeated Lucan 2-0 but didn't make the finals. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Andrew Hawlitzky | The Lake Report

Parent volunteer Dylan Skubel wore several hats last weekend as Niagara-on-the-Lake minor hockey hosted its annual Winter Classic U9 Tournament.

When the NOTL Wolves U9 head coach wasn't busy leading the team, he was working the barbecue, raising money to help keep the tournament running smoothly.

The work of parents and

volunteers behind the scenes is essential for keeping the tourney on track.

"Having great parents on the team makes the coach's job a lot easier and you're not having to deal with any issues with the

parents and the parents trust the process and trust your judgment on the ice," said Skubel.

For the U9 age group, this is a developmental season, focused

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NOTL is \$13M behind on infrastructure spending: Report

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is currently not spending enough to maintain its roads, pipes and oth-

er municipal infrastructure, with a new plan identifying that the town is \$13 million short on funding annually.

The draft 2024 asset management plan, presented to council at a Jan. 13 workshop, estimates the

town would need to spend about \$22.3 million a year to maintain infrastructure at current service levels but is currently funding about \$9.2 million annually.

The plan also puts the replacement value of the

town's municipal infrastructure at about \$1.07 billion — a measure of what it would cost to rebuild roads, pipes, buildings and other assets today.

It outlines the town's inventory of infrastructure,

asset condition and lifecycle costs, providing a framework to support long-term planning.

The plan does not approve any tax or rate increases,

Continued on Page 2



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Infrastructure spending shortfall is not unusual: Expert

Continued from Front Page

but is intended to inform future budget discussions and investment decisions.

In an email, town communications co-ordinator Marah Minor said the town's last asset management plan was completed in 2015.

"Since then, the town has continued to advance its asset management practices," Minor said, adding that an asset management co-ordinator was hired to support the updated plan and ensure asset data remains "current, accurate and aligned with long-term infrastructure planning and service delivery."

The presentation was delivered by asset management adviser Marisa Banuelos-Spencer of PSD Citywide Inc., who said the town's situation is not unusual.

"Municipalities across the province are generally, for the most part, in a similar struggle," she said.

The plan is based on close to 32,000 individual assets, including roads, bridges,

water and wastewater systems, stormwater infrastructure, buildings, vehicles and equipment. As of the end of 2024, 79 per cent of assets were rated in fair condition or better.

The funding gap, the plan notes, is driven by a combination of aging infrastructure, rising construction costs, lower-than-required reinvestment levels and climate-related impacts that are accelerating deterioration — particularly for roads and stormwater systems.

Coun. Gary Burroughs raised concerns about gaps in asset condition assessments, particularly related to stormwater infrastructure, and questioned whether recent road deterioration caused by harsh winter conditions is fully reflected in the data.

"We're having stormwater issues throughout the municipality," he said. "So that doesn't show up in this kind of study."

Banuelos-Spencer said asset conditions are projected forward using deterioration curves, which estimate how infrastructure declines over



Asset management adviser Marisa Banuelos-Spencer outlines the growing cost of maintaining NOTL's infrastructure as council gets its first look at a new asset management plan Jan. 13. PAIGE SEBURN

time based on the most recent inspections.

She said portions of the stormwater network have been assessed using closed-circuit television inspections, with coverage expanding annually as part of ongoing asset management requirements.

She said the issues Burroughs raised may relate more to system capacity than asset condition, which

would require separate design work to identify.

Town staff acknowledged some increased road deterioration this winter but said affected roads were already identified for replacement or resurfacing in coming years, consistent with condition assessments.

Burroughs also pushed back on a recommendation directing staff to use the plan's suggested funding

increases as guidance for future budgets.

"We haven't got the information from other municipalities yet," he said, noting that municipalities across Ontario are preparing asset management plans under the same provincial requirements.

"There's over 400 municipalities in Ontario that are all doing the same thing. Do we have a comparison of their status?" he asked.

Banuelos-Spencer said no province-wide comparison is publicly available, but based on her experience working with municipalities across Ontario, NOTL's position is not atypical.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor also called for broader context as council reviewed the draft plan, saying comparisons with similar municipalities would help guide future decision-making and could be explored in future phases of the plan.

Banuelos-Spencer said those questions would be addressed in a future phase of the plan.

O'Connor also stressed the importance of clarity around what council would

— and would not — be approving.

"I want to make sure that if we do approve this, that we are not tying ourselves into a specific increase of percentages," she said.

Staff confirmed the funding figures outlined in the plan are recommended in principle only and would still require council approval through next year's budget.

O'Connor further noted that infrastructure funding pressures are not unique to NOTL but are being felt by municipalities across the province and country and said it would be helpful for that context to be acknowledged in the plan.

Banuelos-Spencer agreed and said that context will be considered going forward: "This is a challenge across the country," she said.

O'Connor also asked how leased vehicles are treated in the plan and said future asset planning should consider natural assets not currently captured. Banuelos-Spencer said the plan includes only vehicles owned by the municipality, not leased ones.

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Niagara River – on the rocks



In case you haven't noticed, we're having a particularly cold winter this year (at least, compared to last year). At the mouth of the Niagara River, ice forms and floats on the water on Jan. 20. Expect temperatures to hit a low of -16 C this weekend. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

\$82K provincial grant buys new fire gear

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Firefighters' bunker gear is designed to protect them in emergencies — but after a fire, that same equipment can carry cancer-causing contaminants, making access to clean backup gear critical.

Niagara-on-the-Lake Fire and Emergency Services will receive an \$82,000 provincial grant to purchase second sets of bunker gear for firefighters so they can remain available while contaminated equipment goes through its lengthy wash-and-dry process.

The fire department received the funding after applying for the Fire Protection Grant, a \$30-million program the Ontario government introduced in 2024 to help fire departments reduce cancer risks for firefighters.

Fire Chief Jay Plato said 100 per cent of the money will be used to purchase 24 additional sets of bunker gear.

Plato said the department learned about the grant through the application process administered by the Office of the Fire Marshal under the Ministry of the Solicitor General.

He said the fire marshal's office provided suggested funding thresholds and after assessing the town's bunker gear needs at about \$82,000, the department applied for that amount and was approved.

Andre Thurairatnam, a spokesperson for the office, said the Ontario government is committed to firefighter health and safety and introduced the grant to support firefighter cancer prevention. Grant amounts were based on the number of active fire stations, he said.

"Funding amounts were based on the total number of active fire stations in each



After a fire, bunker gear can be contaminated with cancer-causing substances. NOTL firefighters are getting second sets through a provincial grant to remain available while contaminated gear is cleaned. SUPPLIED

municipality who were approved for grant funding," said Thurairatnam. "This approach ensures a fair and consistent distribution of funding across the province."

All 380 eligible Ontario municipalities applied and were approved for funding in the 2025–26 grant year, he said, and municipalities with one active fire station received approximately \$16,000, with the amount increasing per active fire station.

Marah Minor, the town's communications co-ordinator, says the town received notice that the grant application was approved, but hasn't received the funds yet.

Plato said the additional gear is key to reducing repeated exposure to cancer-causing contaminants after fires.

"After a fire, bunker gear — like the coats and pants that firefighters wear, even everything, gloves, hats, helmet, everything — are contaminated," Plato said. "They're contaminated with carcinogen."

Properly cleaning that gear takes time, Plato said. Moving bunker gear through a full wash-and-dry cycle can take up to eight hours.

"So, what the extra gear does is it ensures that all of our firefighters are able to still be responsive," he said. "But at the same time, it provides the backup."

Each full set of bunker gear now costs roughly \$3,500, Plato said, and the grant helps round out a council-approved initiative launched a few years ago to provide firefighters with second sets of gear.

Thurairatnam said the program supports cancer prevention by funding measures — such as equipment replacement or backups — to reduce exposure to hazardous contaminants.

He noted contaminated protective equipment can expose firefighters to hazardous biological and chemical substances and reduce its effectiveness.

"Firefighters die of cancer at a rate up to four times higher than the general population," he said. "On average, 50 to 60 firefighters die of cancer yearly in Canada — and half of those are from Ontario."

Beyond second sets of bunker gear, Plato said the department has made other investments to reduce exposure risks, including installing large extractor washers at each station, direct-capture exhaust systems for fire trucks and providing shower facilities so firefighters can clean up after incidents.

"We've made some good investments," he said.

"Cancer prevention within the fire service is huge," said Plato. "There's a number of things that we're

doing, ensuring to keep cancer prevention on the top of mind and then trying to do it for our folks."

Plato said cancer prevention has become a growing focus provincially, too.

"There's probably been more focus within the last 10 years," he said, adding "it's always been something that's been known within the fire service."

"Provincially, it's become more of a focus and a topic that people are chatting about," said Plato.

"Just even in the last couple years," he said, pointing to "a couple new cancers" being added to an updated prescribed cancer list.

Plato said protecting volunteers is especially important in a community-based department like NOTL's, where firefighters serve out of commitment rather than compensation.

"People are signing up to become members of our department — not for the pay or not for the reasons that you might become a firefighter in your professional career," he said.

So taking safety seriously is "the least we can do" for volunteer firefighters, Plato said, "to protect them for the great service that they're stepping up and doing."

In a Jan. 16 news release, Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa said the grant supports the town's priority of protecting volunteer firefighters.

"On behalf of council, we are grateful for this provincial investment," he said.

Chief administrative officer Nick Ruller said the funding is an important investment in firefighter safety.

"Modern, high-quality bunker gear is a critical line of defence," Ruller said. "This grant directly supports cancer prevention and long-term health outcomes for the team."

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Icewine Festival draws hundreds of wine seekers

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake might've spent last weekend digging its way out of the snowstorm that hit the region on Thursday, but come Friday and Saturday, hundreds were out on Queen Street deciding to embrace the joys that winter can bring — in this case, its liquid gold.

The Niagara Icewine Festival opened its village in downtown Niagara-on-the-Lake last weekend, bringing together wineries and food vendors for guests to sample locally made icewine and food pairings in one place.

Joanna Merletti travelled from Grand Island, N.Y., to Niagara-on-the-Lake for the Icewine Festival Village, calling it a welcome outing after the holidays as visitors sampled icewine along Queen Street on Jan. 17.

"It's a great time of year because there's nothing else to do," said Merletti. "The holidays are over, and this is so festive and so nice."



Chilly weather can't keep these warm smiles away. Mike Fedus and his son, five-year-old Christopher, take in the winter vibes at the Icewine Festival. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

For Niagara Falls residents Tim and Joanne Caron, the village offered a quick way to sample the region without driving from winery to winery.

"It's nice that it's so localized, and you get a little taste of everything," said Tim Caron.

Leeanne Spelier, Grape and Wine Festival board member and winery representative from Peller, said clear weather after a heavy snowstorm earlier in the week was favourable for the festival as more than 200 people entered within the first hour. Later in the

afternoon, volunteer Sylvia Kaptein said her entrance alone processed 500 people in just one hour.

Spelier said the festival is also trying to broaden how people think about icewine, with cocktails and other formats that soften its sweetness.

"Icewine is a sweeter drink, and some palates aren't as friendly to that, so by diversifying with it, I think it really helps," said Spelier.

Inside the village were several new additions meant to make the festival memorable between tastings, including a new Icewine Imaginarium, four themed booths for photos with brochures inside teaching people some background on icewine flavourings, including sweet, citrus, honey and berry.

Spelier said the festival wanted to expand on how icewine can be enjoyed by highlighting some new features, like table wine and a Niagara College beer made with icewine.

Matt Finn, event manager for the Niagara Grape and Wine Festival and unofficial icewine aficionado, said the options helped address a common perception that icewine is meant to be sipped on its own after dinner.

"We're the number one producer of icewine in the world these days, and not

everybody wants to sip ice wine on its own," said Finn.

Festival business development manager Tina Myers emphasized Niagara as a major global hub for the icewine industry, and that while she sees this as an opportunity for people to buy local and support Canadian businesses, they also welcome all visitors.

"Our campaign is more about 'glasses up,'" said Myers. "We want to enjoy with our American partners. We want them to come and enjoy."

Representatives from the new Foodland on Garrison Village Road were also at the festival, giving out free hot chocolate and letting the community know about their upcoming grand opening on Jan. 29. Bakery manager Carrie Corfield said people from Garrison Village are very excited about the opportunity to have a walkable grocery store in their neighbourhood.

The festival continues next weekend, running Jan. 24 and 25.

andrew@niagaranow.com

Too much tablet time? Library talk offers guidance for parents

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

If you're a parent looking to figure out a way to manage a young child who won't get off their tablet, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library has just the right person for you.

Jackie van Lankfeld has decades of experience working with children under five in settings ranging from Uganda and Costa Rica to the Niagara region, where she lives.

She will speak to parents about preschoolers and their interactions with smartphones, tablets and other tech devices at an event hosted by the library on Jan. 22. The invitation followed a similar talk she gave to parents in Pelham/Fonthill last November.

Van Lankfeld is a pediatric speech and language pathologist and has worked in early literacy for 20 years. She also runs her own company, Expressive Edge, and said she has worked with "hundreds" of children during her career.

She is also a member of the Canadian Paediatric Society's digital task force on screen time, a role she



Jackie van Lankfeld has made a career working with children aged 0 to 5. She hopes to help inform parents about how their young children can operate with screens during a talk at the NOTL Library on Jan. 22. SUBMITTED

has held since the group was founded in 2015.

Dr. Robin Williams, a pediatrician who has also worked in public health and knows Van Lankfeld, said they reviewed the data and it came to a strong conclusion about screen usage.

"It's become more evident that it definitely has an impact on kids," she said, particularly saying that particularly interferes with kids' social interaction and learning abilities.

Van Lankfeld also said there's a remedy, saying there is an "abundance of literature out there" showing children learn language best through face-to-face

interaction with real people.

While she does not view screens as inherently harmful and noted they can offer educational, "interactive" programmes such as "Sesame Street" or "Dora the Explorer," she said screen time for young children should be limited.

"The research tells us that ... increased screen time is associated with decreased cognitive development, language acquisition, social emotional health (and) attention-related difficulties," she said.

One parent in NOTL, Christy Vanderloos, told The Lake Report via the NOTL 4 All Facebook

group that she believes she's seen the consequences of too much screen time in her seven-year-old daughter.

"Because of COVID and working from home, my daughter was exposed to more screen time than she should have. I see the effects now. Needed glasses by age six, and several other kids in her age group at school also have glasses now," she said.

"I blame the screens for that, among other things. I regret allowing so much use during that time."

A systematic review and meta-analysis on digital screen time and myopia, or nearsightedness, was published last February by JAMA Network Open, a medical journal published by the American Medical Association.

That review, which analyzed 45 studies on the subject, found that the risk of nearsightedness increased significantly from one to four hours of screen time and then rose more gradually thereafter.

Williams, who also played a role in introducing public smoking regulations to Niagara, said there were parallels with the topic of screen time and smoking, particularly in terms of how the data coming in is

pointing to a conclusion that society has to do something about something that can harm people.

In December, Australia made global headlines when it became the first country in the world to ban social media for users under the age of 16, including platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, YouTube and more.

Williams said efforts to get screens out of Australian schools are a positive development — the country's province of Victoria is looking to introduce a 90-minute screen-time limit for primary school students. She also sees it as potentially positive that Canadian schools are going more in that direction.

She said she couldn't comment on the age 16 limit for social media in Australia because it just came in and there wasn't data on it yet.

Van Lankfeld said the Canadian Paediatric Society recommends no screen time for children under two and less than one hour a day for children aged three to five.

She said parents should establish clear guidelines around screen use, especially given how prevalent screens are in daily life.

She added that parents' own screen habits matter, noting she applied those principles with her two daughters, who are now adults.

She said the amount of time parents spend on screens can reduce the time available to support their children's learning.

"Specifically, for the under five, I would recommend that they focus on learning opportunities that our real life and make sure they're modelling and monitoring," she said. "Some people just really have no idea how much screen time they are actually doing."

Van Lankfeld said she hopes to provide parents with strategies to help children navigate a screen-heavy world and to ease the guilt that can come with monitoring screen use.

Williams said for children who should be spending time getting socialized, there's no replacement for an actual human face and that screens should be done in moderation.

"I think any way that we can moderate it, minimize it is a good thing," said Williams.

The event runs from 4 to 5 p.m. Registration is available at notlpubliclibrary.org.

daniel@niagaranow.com



Dozens of Niagara College students harvested several boxes of frozen Vidal grapes, which were taken to the college's teaching winery for pressing. After fermentation and aging, these grapes will be turned into icewine. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Icewine harvest? Snow problem

Continued from Front Page

icewine, dubbed "liquid gold" by many in the world of viticulture.

Being out in the cold early in the morning might be difficult for some, but for Donavan Gilroy, who left a life of playing saxophone at Wilfrid Laurier University behind to join the college's wine and viticultural technician program, this kind of thing is what he signed up for.

Gilroy, a first-year student, says when he joined the program, he wanted to get his "hands dirty" with practical work. He knew grape-picking in the cold was coming and says he was looking forward to it.

"It's one of the most Canadian things there is," he says.

Every winter, the same process unfolds at wineries across Niagara-on-the-Lake. This year, some wineries harvested in December, while others are still picking grapes.

This is the 25th year Niagara College has done the icewine harvest. In total, 40 students took part in Jan. 16's harvest.

Most of the students are in their first or second year of the winery and viticultural technician programs, with a few from the hospitality program.

"In most cases, it's their first time picking icewine," says Gavin Robertson, wine

professor at Niagara College. Robertson guided his students through the process on Friday.

Jamie Slingerland, director of viticulture at Pillitteri Estate Winery, says icewine harvesting in a professional vineyard is "not for the faint of heart."

"Most icewine harvest occur in the night as it is always colder during the darkness of night," he says. "My fellow growers and myself work long hours picking the grapes often 20 hours straight at a time. We harvest on a large scale and usually need multiple nights to pick. Sometimes it is cold enough in the day."

Slingerland says Pillitteri has both Brock University and Niagara College students working at the vineyard. He says there was a shortage of these students and hopes that more attend.

"We have had nothing but success with these students and wineries compete for their talents," he says.

After picking the grapes, students load them into large cartons and lift them by forklift. The grapes are then dumped into barrels and fed into a press that extracts the juice.

The juice is later fermented and bottled to produce icewine, known for its especially sweet taste. To be labelled icewine, the juice must contain a minimum of 35 per cent sugar to 65 per cent liquid.

Icewine also stands apart because of the conditions required to make it. Vintners Quality Assurance, the body that regulates icewine, requires grapes to be harvested at temperatures of -8 C or lower. As a result, students and staff must take advantage of narrow weather windows.

The freezing temperatures also limit how much juice the grapes produce. Allison Findlay, the college's head winemaker, says icewine grapes yield only about 20 per cent juice, which is "thick and viscous," compared with about 70 per cent from typical wine grapes.

"Any spill with icewine is expensive," says Robertson as he instructs students during the pressing.

By harvest time, the grapes have been hanging on the vines for months as part of the 2025 growing season, Findlay says.

Slingerland says that at his winery, "Historically, 90 to 100 per cent of the icewine harvest has occurred in the first two to three weeks of January. For the 2025 vintage, grapes grown in that calendar year, we had cold weather in early December that transformed the grapes to become icewine grapes."

Some wineries, including Arterra Wines Canada and Jackson-Triggs Winery, have already completed their icewine harvests for

the year.

Niagara College serves its finished icewine at campus establishments such as the Benchmark restaurant and sells it to outside restaurants and stores.

The icewine is also featured at the NOTL Icewine Festival, which began last Friday. Amanda Baldinelli, hospitality and events manager for Niagara College, says the college is showcasing its Icewine Strong Ale, a beer infused with icewine.

"For the first time ever, the festival wanted to feature a product that wasn't icewine," she says. "They were interested in creating beer but that was blended with icewine."

"It's a first for us, we've never made this product before."

Baldinelli says the beer combines "two finished products" — beer and icewine grape juice. The initial test run includes 1,200 cans, with future production depending on demand.

That spirit of experimentation helped attract Gilroy to the program. He says he admires the Niagara wine industry for its relative youth and openness to new ideas, and he hopes the skills he is learning will one day bring happiness to others.

"It's one of the most romantic things in the world," he says.

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Old Town heritage expansion draws concerns about overreach

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Hundreds of Old Town properties could soon face new heritage rules — and residents are raising concerns about renovation costs, overreach and whether too many homes are being swept in.

Niagara-on-the-Lake council received an information report Tuesday on a draft plan that would significantly expand the Queen-Picton heritage conservation district beyond Old Town's historic commercial core, where the district plan has been focused since it was created in 1986.

If adopted, the phase two heritage conservation district plan would extend heritage rules to surrounding residential and institutional areas not currently regulated, bringing more than 500 properties — including both "contributing" and "non-contributing" buildings — under the district.

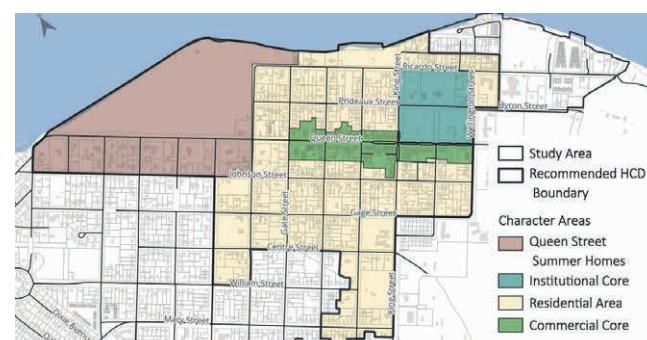
And if ultimately approved by council, the draft plan would introduce new heritage policies and permit requirements for certain alterations, additions, demolitions and new development within the district.

The draft says all properties within the proposed boundaries were reviewed to determine whether they contribute to the district's heritage character. Contributing properties are generally buildings constructed during the district's identified periods of significance, from 1814 to 1914, that retain historic architectural features or contextual value. Properties that do not meet those criteria are classified as non-contributing.

The draft notes, however, that changes to any property, including new construction, can still affect the district's overall heritage character. As a result, policies and requirements would apply to all properties within the proposed boundaries, not just historical properties.

Council was not asked to approve the draft Tuesday, only to receive the report and hear public input through a public meeting. No final decision has been made.

Senior heritage planner Sumra Zia presented the report and responded to questions from councillors and the public. Christophe Rivet, principal with Cultural Spaces, the heritage



A draft boundary map shows how the proposed heritage expansion could reshape rules for hundreds of Old Town properties. Some residents are concerned. SOURCED

consulting firm hired by the town, also participated.

Staff said public input will be reviewed as part of the current planning stage, with a revised plan and recommendations returning to council for a decision at a later date.

Several residents raised concerns about how the expanded district could affect homeowners whose properties are not historic.

Mark Wheaton, a Nassau Street resident, questioned why entire blocks are included when many homes were built decades after the period of heritage significance.

"I asked myself, what's this got to do with heritage?" he said, calling the expanded boundary "overreach" and warning that homeowners

could become "collateral damage" under the expanded district.

Retired Ontario architect Malcolm Lowry, who lives within the study area, said the draft raises practical and financial concerns.

"Why should a recently built property, say last year, require a heritage permit for alteration?" he asked. "That does not make any sense to me."

Lowry also warned the draft lacks clarity around permit requirements and could increase costs for homeowners.

"The guidelines have not a lot of regard for the cost of implementation," he said, pointing to the price difference between

traditional materials and modern alternatives.

"If you've replaced a cedar roof recently, you'll know that the cost of replacing a cedar roof is about four, or more, times [more expensive] than an asphalt roof," he said.

Infrastructure concerns were also raised.

Colin Kelly, a Queen Street summer homeowner, said parts of the proposed district still lack sanitary and storm sewers and asked whether long-term servicing plans are being considered alongside the heritage expansion.

After council chair Coun. Erwin Wiens said Kelly would need to follow up with staff, Kelly said, "as someone that has lived there for 26 years, I followed up a lot and been told it was going to happen — and has never happened."

"So that's where we are at the moment," he added.

Maria Vaneva, a resident who lives near the Royal George Theatre, questioned why the theatre is not listed as a contributing property in the draft. Staff said it would follow up.

Not all speakers opposed the expansion.

Gracia Janes, president

of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Conservancy, said the organization has supported expanding the heritage district since the late 1980s, but questioned why some historically significant areas were included while others were not.

Paul Mace, vice-chair of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum, said the museum is already working with town staff on expansion plans and asked how the proposed district could affect projects already underway.

"For the first time ever, we're at the five yard line ready to hit the end zone," Mace said.

Barbara Worthy, the NOTL museum's community engagement co-ordinator, who lives on Delater Street within the proposed district, said she still does not know whether her home could be singled out for individual heritage designation and has not received any communication since last year.

"Are we now removed from this whole issue of being forced designation, individual designation?" she asked.

Staff said the question would need to be followed up after the meeting.

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NOTL appoints new planning director

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake has tapped a familiar face to lead one of its most consequential departments, appointing longtime town planner Aimee Alderman as director of planning, building and development services, effective Jan. 19.

As director, Alderman will oversee the town's planning and building divisions and lead decisions on growth, land use and development — work that influences where building happens, how projects are approved and how the town balances growth with its environmental, social, cultural and economic goals.

Alderman was not available for an interview by press time but said in a town announcement Thursday that she intends to work collaboratively and focus on responsive service.

"I deeply appreciate what makes this community



Niagara-on-the-Lake has turned to a longtime town planner to lead its planning, building and development services department. Aimee Alderman said she plans to focus on collaboration and responsive service. SUPPLIED

exceptional: its people, its heritage and its strong sense of place," Alderman said.

"My focus will be working collaboratively with council, staff, residents and our partners to deliver responsive service and ensure our work strengthens a healthy, resilient future for the town."

Alderman previously worked as a senior planner and manager of development planning for the town and is not new to planning files that have drawn public attention.

As a senior planner, she has appeared on development applications, including the Rand Estate proposal, where she responded to resident questions and outlined the town's planning process.

The release said Alderman brings leadership experience and a strategic approach to implementing council priorities and is known for a collaborative, solutions-focused style that considers the needs of applicants, residents and the broader community.

Alderman has 10 years of municipal and regional planning experience and holds an honours bachelor of public health degree from Brock University and a master's degree in rural planning and development from the University of Guelph, along with professional planning credentials at both the provincial and national levels.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa called Alderman's appointment "well-deserved," saying the role plays a key part in shaping the town's future. He said council looks forward to working with her.

Chief administrative officer Nick Ruller said Alderman has a strong understanding of planning policy and community needs and expressed confidence in her as a member of the senior leadership team.

The town also thanked John Henricks for serving as interim director during a period of transition. He served in the role since Nov. 19.

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NOTICE OF COMPLETE APPLICATION, OPEN HOUSE AND PUBLIC MEETING

What: Notice of **Complete Application, Open House and Public Meeting** for a **Zoning By-law Amendment** (under Section 34 of the *Planning Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13, as amended)

When: Open House: **Monday, February 2, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.**
Public Meeting: **Tuesday, March 3, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.**

Where: Open House: Electronically via the directions below
Public Meeting: In-person at Town Hall, Council Chambers, 1593 Four Mile Creek Road, Virgil, or electronically via the directions below

Regarding: File No. ZBA-27-2025 | 1743 Four Mile Creek Road & 15 Elden Street, Niagara-on-the-Lake

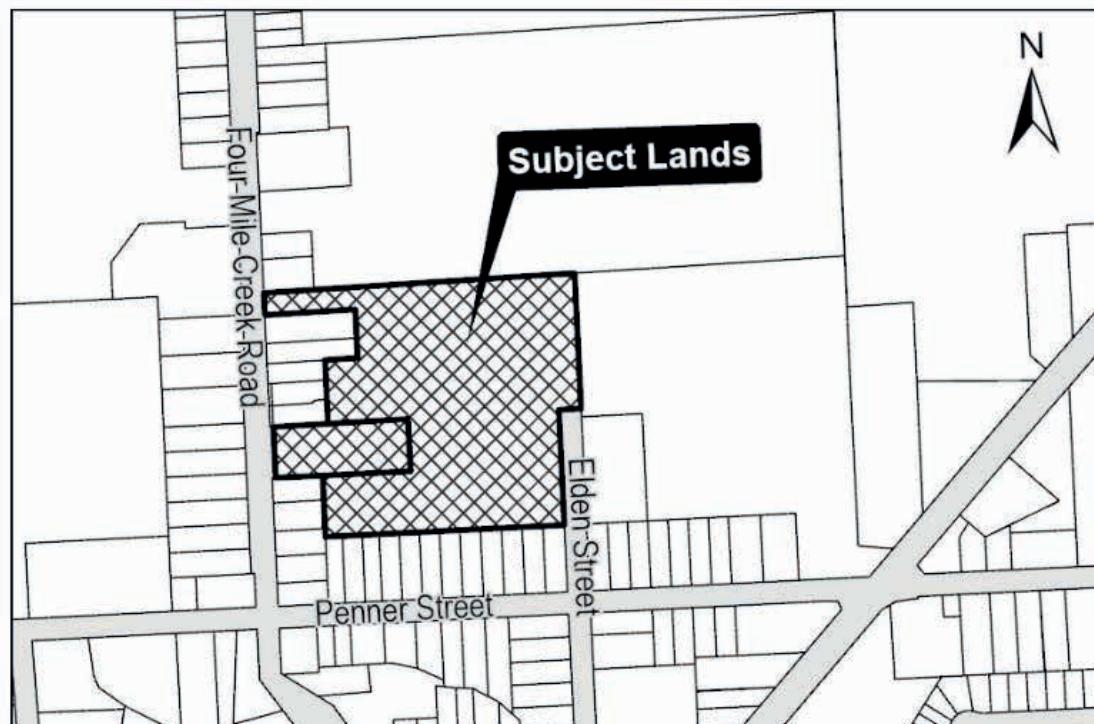
What is this?

An application has been received for a Zoning By-law Amendment on the subject lands, which includes two separate parcels (see location map).

The Zoning By-law Amendment seeks to permit a Day Care Centre as an additional use within the existing senior living residence by introducing site-specific provisions to the "Residential Multiple (RM2) Zone" under Zoning By-law 4316-09, as amended.

The proposal includes renovating the basement of the existing building at 1743 Four Mile Creek Road to accommodate a licensed Day Care Centre with a capacity of 96 children.

The existing courtyard at 1743 Four Mile Creek Road will be converted into an outdoor play area for the Day Care Centre. No exterior building additions or changes to the parking area are proposed as part of this Zoning By-law Amendment application..



Dialogue is encouraged:

You are invited to attend the Open House and Public Meeting to gather information and provide input regarding this matter.

Town Hall is open for the public to attend Committee of the Whole and Council Meetings, including Public Meetings, in-person. Alternatively, the public will continue to have the option to register in advance to participate electronically.

The Open House will continue to be held electronically at this time.

If you wish to participate electronically at the Open House or Public Meeting, you must register in advance with the Town Staff noted below. You will receive an email on the date of the meeting with instructions to connect to the Open House and/or Public Meeting on your computer, tablet or telephone.

- **Open House** – Alex Boekestyn (alex.boekestyn@notl.com) or 905-468-6430
(register as soon as possible but prior to 12:00 p.m. on Monday, February 2, 2026)
- **Public Meeting** – Clerks Department (clerks@notl.com) or 905-468-3266
(register as soon as possible but prior to 12:00 p.m. on Monday, March 2, 2026)

If you wish to attend the Public Meeting in-person, registration with the Clerk is appreciated.

If you wish to view the Open House and/or Public Meeting for information purposes, registration is not required. The meetings will be recorded and available for viewing after the meetings on the Town's website at <https://www.notl.com/council-government/meetings-agendas-minutes>

Please Note: Written comments on the application are encouraged and must be submitted to the Town Clerk, at 1593 Four Mile Creek Road, P.O. Box 100, Virgil, ON L0S 1T0 or via email at clerks@notl.com referencing the above file number. Unless indicated otherwise, all submissions, including personal information, will become part of the public record.

For more information:

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 Community and Development Services Department within Town Hall.

Please contact Alex Boekestyn, Planner II, at 905-468-6430 or via email at alex.boekestyn@notl.com if additional information is required.

If you wish to be notified of the future decision with respect to the application, you must submit a written request to the Town Clerk including your name and the address to which such notice should be sent.

If a person or public body would otherwise have an ability to appeal the decision of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake to the Ontario Land Tribunal but the person or public body does not make oral submissions at a public meeting or make written submissions to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake before the by-law is passed, the person or public body is not entitled to appeal the decision.

If a person or public body does not make oral submissions at a public meeting, or make written submissions to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake before the by-law is passed, the person or public body may not be added as a party to the hearing of an appeal before the Ontario Land Tribunal unless, in the opinion of the Tribunal, there are reasonable grounds to do so.

Please note that third party appeals are restricted for this application as per Bill 185, Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024. *Planning Act* appeals may be filed by the applicant, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, a "specified person" (as defined by the *Planning Act* 1(1)), and any "public body" (as defined by the *Planning Act* 1(1)).

Dated at the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, January 22, 2026

Grant Bivol, Town Clerk

NOTL's U9 Wolves graduate to full ice games

Continued from Front Page

on skills and learning the game's fundamentals.

The kids start the year playing on only half the ice but in January — and last weekend's tournament — they move to full ice, which adds new rules (including offside, icing and penalties) plus a lot more room to skate and move around.

In their first taste of competition, the Wolves opened Pool A play last Friday with a 2-2 tie against the Pelham Panthers at Centennial Arena.

"They fought back hard and didn't stop," said Skubel.

Later that day, at the Meridian Credit Union Arena, they faced a strong team from Woolwich and lost 7-0.

"They didn't give up.

They fought right to the end of the game," Skubel noted.

The Wolves finished their round-robin schedule with a 2-0 win over the Lucan Irish on Saturday morning. Goaltender Colton Ferguson recorded the shutout and also was named the Wolves' MVP.

With their 1-1-1 round-robin record the Wolves performed well overall but



The NOTL Wolves U9's Ian Neufeld scores in the third period in NOTL's 2-0 win over the Lucan Irish on Saturday. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

weren't able to advance to the tourney's playoff round.

Tournament organizer James Cadeau said parents and board volunteers filled key roles, from coaching to timekeeping to running the barbecue.

That's all important to create a great experience for the kids, who at this stage in their development are just learning the game.

"You just never know if it's going to be somebody's going to be on a breakaway and fall down, or if the

goalie's going to make an unbelievable save," he said.

For the players, Skubel said tournaments also create time together that regular practices do not, even when the event is held at home.

"The tournament kind of gives them an opportunity to be together, have some fun off the rink as well, and helps them build those friendships, not only on the ice but off the ice then, that are honestly going to last them a lifetime," he said.

The team includes play-

ers from Niagara-on-the-Lake's three elementary schools, which helps the kids build friendships outside their own classrooms, he added.

He feels that keeping local minor hockey strong matters in small communities where some families travel long distances for ice time.

"If we can keep that here in Niagara-on-the-Lake and make sure that our kids have somewhere to play, I think that's a huge thing," said Skubel.



NOTL Wolves U9 teammates swarm goaltender Colton Ferguson, who earned a shutout in NOTL's 2-0 win over Lucan Irish on Saturday. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

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Urban speed limit dropping to 40 km/h

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Mind your meter this winter, NOTL: the speed limit is coming down by 10 kilometres an hour in the town's urban areas, starting with St. Davids and Queenston this month.

The speed limit will drop to 40 km/h from 50 km/h on all urban local roads, save for in Chautauqua, where the limit will drop to 30 km/h.

The change will roll out over the next three months, the town announced this month. In January, the new limit will take effect in St. Davids and Queenston. Old Town will follow in February, with Glendale and Virgil in March.

"Lower speeds give drivers more time to react and significantly reduce the severity of collisions," said Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa in a press release. "This change is about protecting our road users and creating safer, more livable neighbourhoods in our community."

"NEW" tabs on the signs will highlight the reduced speed limit for the first 90 days after they take effect and the town, co-ordinating



NOTL's urban speed limits will be reduced starting with St. Davids and Queenston. FILE

with the Niagara Regional Police, will begin enforcing the new limit.

The program aligns with the town's commitment to

Vision Zero, a road safety strategy first implemented in Sweden in the 1990s that aims to eliminate traffic deaths and serious injuries.

Last year, the town allocated \$30,000 to implement these changes, which is coming from the town's Vision Zero funds provided by Niagara Region. There will be no extra cost to taxpayers to change the speed limits.

The town noted that urban roads are "shared by pedestrians, cyclists, motorists, transit vehicles, delivery traffic, and other road users."

"Lower speeds help reduce the severity of collisions and create safer conditions for everyone who uses these roads."

Sam Jackson, a Niagara Falls resident who came out to Queenston to walk his dog, said similar debates have been happening where he lives, particularly regarding the speed cameras which the province banned late last year.

He sees this change as arbitrary and believes there should be justification for it.

"Let's not just lower the speed for the sake of lowering the speed with the assumption that 'Well, it might work and if it saves one life on the back end, then it's totally worth it,'" he said. "That's just a cyni-

cal argument they like to use."

Chief administrative officer Nick Ruller cited research in the announcement that says a 10 per cent reduction in speed can reduce fatal collisions by as much as 40 per cent.

The Global Alliance of NGOs for Road Safety cites this same research finding as coming from 2009 report from the Institute of Transport Economics from Norway.

"This initiative aligns NOTL with neighbouring municipalities that have already implemented similar speed reductions and supports consistent driver expectations across jurisdictions," Ruller said.

daniel@niagaranow.com

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Recycling pickup change frustrates Queen Street merchants

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Laura Cochran, the owner of Rocky Mountain Chocolate on Queen Street, uses quite a bit of recyclables in her business serving confectionary products, from chocolate bars to boxed chocolates.

She is frustrated at the province's decision to put recycling collection in the hands of producers that supply products made of paper, glass, metal or plastic to consumers in Ontario, effectively privatizing non-residential recycling. This change came into effect on Jan. 1.

Apart from the extra costs imposed on businesses, Cochran said she foresees "seven different trucks coming up and down the street" at different times in the future, which she does not think is a good look on a place meant for tourists.

It has impacted her business, and the future looks more complicated in her eyes.

"Long-term, I don't see how this is going to be beneficial for anybody," said Cochran.

The move by the province has drawn disapproval from



Left: Hannele Wegge and her husband Tommy run the Queen Street business Harmony Lifestyle. Tommy said the province doesn't know what it's doing with putting non-residential recycling in private hands. Right: Laura Cochran, owner of Rocky Mountain Chocolate, is displeased with the province's new recycling privatization. DAN SMEENK

some business operators in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Some NOTL business owners, including Tommy Wegge of Harmony Lifestyle on Queen Street, said the provincial government did not properly plan for this program.

"In this case, they really don't — obviously — do not know what they are doing," he said.

Wegge also echoed Cochran's concerns about the potential for a lot of trucks to come down Queen Street.

"We would like to see, rather, the customers coming in with their cars instead of cars driving back and forth," he said.

Before the December holiday break, the town created a temporary program funded through the municipal accommodation tax to collect cardboard from businesses on Queen Street throughout 2026. That includes Rocky Mountain Chocolate and Harmony Lifestyle.

They collect cardboard on Mondays and Saturdays, which Wegge said are "good days for us."

Coun. Andrew Niven, who also works as director of marketing and hospitality at Konzelmann Estate Winery, said town staff have told him the program is operating as intended.



"Pickups have continued without interruption, and to date, no service issues have been reported to town staff," he said in an email. "I look forward to receiving progress reports in the near future to gauge service levels and plan for a longer-term outcome beyond 2026."

Business owners have experienced varying impacts from the change. Katherine McMichael, owner of Lady Lou Collective on Queen Street, said she had some "concern" when this was brought in, but said her business has not been significantly affected.

"We mainly only deal

with cardboard, and the town came up with a solution for cardboard being picked up on Mondays and Saturdays," said McMichael. "So, we didn't have to find a solution."

Niven, who works in the winery industry, said like other wineries Konzelmann has not been significantly adversely affected because it has an independent pickup service.

But for businesses like Cochran's, she said she sometimes takes plastic recyclables home and asks employees to put them in the garbage because she doesn't want the extra cost of a private recycle service.

"We're filling the landfill needlessly," she said.

Cochran said she is grateful for the cardboard pickup but believes there has been "confusion" during the rollout. She said she has seen three or four trucks pass by with unclear pickup locations.

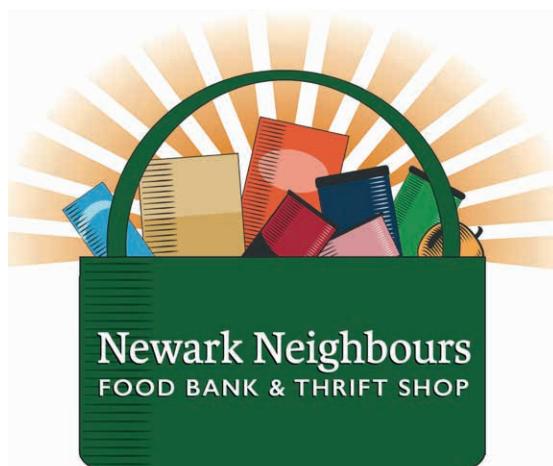
"I came in here last Friday and there was a pile of cardboard in front of my store, which did not come from my store," said Cochran. "And there was no pickup on Friday, or so I thought, because it's supposed to be Monday and Saturday. But sure enough, a truck comes by Friday and picks up the cardboard."

"Is that a growing pain? I don't know."

Beyond 2026, it remains unclear how non-residential recycling will operate in the town. Niven said potential long-term solutions include a centralized recycling drop-off or extending the town's cardboard collection program, but he said the town will need to adapt if privatization continues.

"We'll take this year as a learning (experience)," he said.

daniel@niagaranow.com



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Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake - staff and council
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The Lake Report
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NOTL Wolves U15 Rep Team
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Gateway Community Church
Bethany Mennonite Church
St Davids Queenston UCW
"In Stitches" Quilting Group
St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
Feed Niagara and the Great Holiday Food Drive
Stone Road Village Residents Association
The Village Residents Association
Kings Points Residents Association
Harmony Drive Residents

Creekside Senior Estates
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NOTICE OF COMPLETE APPLICATIONS AND OPEN HOUSE

What: Notice of **Complete Applications** and **Open House** for a **Draft Plan of Subdivision and Draft Plan of Common Elements Condominium** (under Section 51 of the *Planning Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13, as amended).

When: **Open House on Monday, February 9, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.**

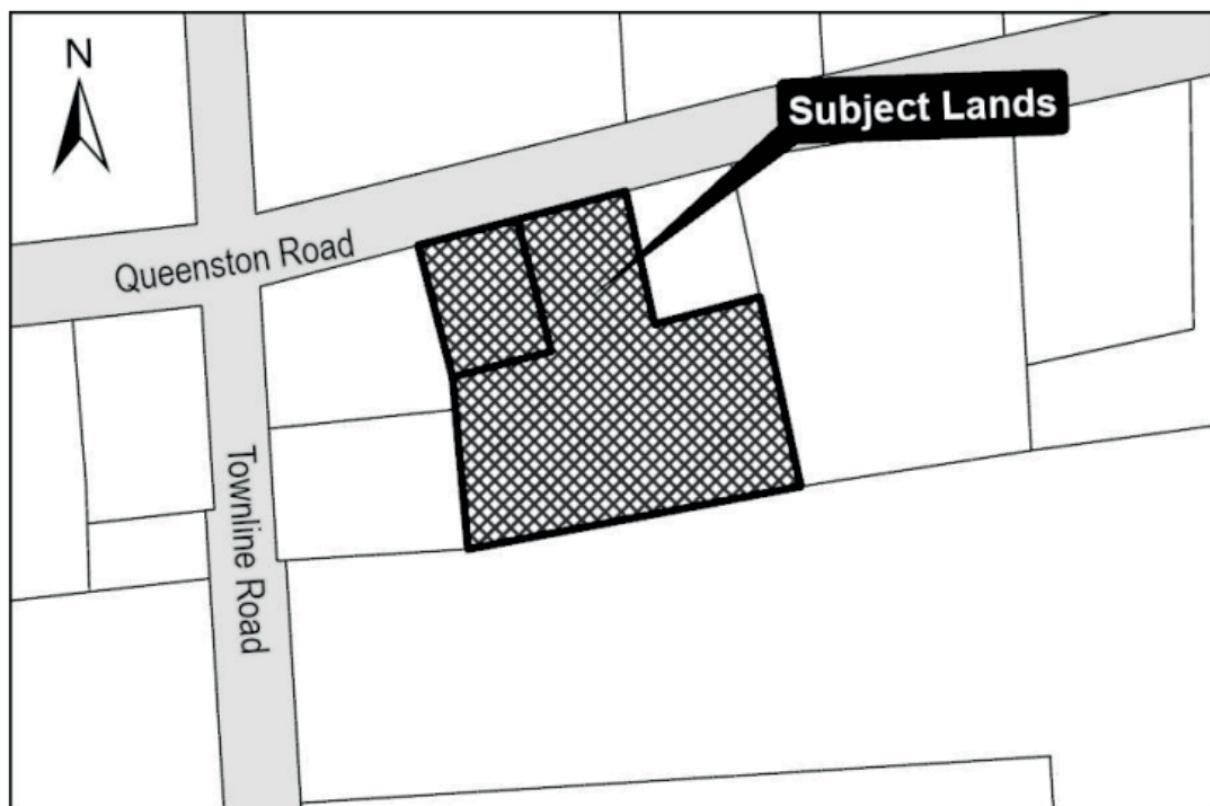
Where: Electronically via the directions below

Regarding: File Nos. 26T-18-25-03 & 26CD-18-25-07 – 475-481 Queenston Road, Niagara-on-the-Lake

What is this?

Applications have been received for a Draft Plan of Subdivision and a Draft Plan of Common Elements Condominium on the subject lands (see location map).

The applications propose the creation of ten (10) lots for single-detached dwellings on each new lot and one (1) block to accommodate a private park. The private park is proposed to be facilitated through the Draft Plan of Common Elements Condominium and is proposed to be maintained in common ownership by the ten (10) landowners of the new single-detached dwelling lots. A new public roadway is proposed to connect to Queenston Road that would provide access to each new proposed lot and the private park block.



Dialogue is encouraged:

You are invited to attend the Open House to gather information and provide input regarding this matter.

The Open House will continue to be held electronically at this time.

If you wish to participate electronically at the Open House, you must register in advance with the Town Staff noted below. You will receive an email on the date of the meeting with instructions to connect to the Open House on your computer, tablet or telephone.

- **Open House** – Victoria Nikoltcheva (victoria.nikoltcheva@notl.com or 905-468-6451)
(register as soon as possible but prior to 12 noon on Monday, February 9, 2026)

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

Please Note: Written comments on the applications are encouraged and must be submitted to the Town Clerk, at 1593 Four Mile Creek Road, P.O. Box 100, Virgil, ON L0S 1T0 or via email at clerks@notl.com referencing the above file numbers. Unless indicated otherwise, all submissions, including personal information, will become part of the public record.

For more information:

A copy of the applications 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 & Development Services Department within Town Hall. Please contact Victoria Nikoltcheva, Senior Planner, at 905-468-6451 or via email at victoria.nikoltcheva@notl.com if additional information is required.

If you wish to be notified of the future decision with respect to the applications, you must submit a written request to the Town Clerk including your name and the address to which such notice should be sent.

If a person or public body would otherwise have an ability to appeal the decision of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake to the Ontario Land Tribunal but the person or public body does not make oral submissions at a public meeting or make written submissions to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake before the by-law is passed, the person or public body is not entitled to appeal the decision.

If a person or public body does not make oral submissions at a public meeting, or make written submissions to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake before the by-law is passed, the person or public body may not be added as a party to the hearing of an appeal before the Ontario Land Tribunal unless, in the opinion of the Tribunal, there are reasonable grounds to do so.

Please note that third party appeals are restricted for these applications as per Bill 185, Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024. *Planning Act* appeals may be filed by the applicant, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, a "specified person" (as defined by the *Planning Act* 1(1)), and any "public body" (as defined by the *Planning Act* 1(1)).

Dated at the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, January 22, 2026

Grant Bivol, Town Clerk



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#60: After reading a good book, pass it on to an unhoused person. They appreciate reading material as much as anyone.

This tiny column gives tips to help promote kindness in our lives and spread joy and happiness.



Contributed by Patty Garriock

"Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced."

- James Baldwin

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Mini George in the works

NOTLer Rene Bertschi has been working on a 3D-printed miniature of the Royal George Theatre, which he hopes one day might have a home in the new Royal George. He said he's been having fun looking into the building's history and creating the three-dimensional model of a place where he and his wife have had "so many joyful moments." SUPPLIED

Opinion

Hey NOTL, hope you like trucks



THE TURNER REPORT

Garth Turner
 Columnist

How will the heart of Old Town — NOTL's economic crown jewel — keep beating when run over by excavators, cement pumbers, steel-hauling delivery rigs, dump trucks and a swarm of contractor vehicles building the Royal George complex?

What's the plan to contain mayhem? To save local businesses from going kaput? To survive several years of clogged roads, closed areas and serious impact on the tourist river that keeps this economy watered?

I asked the builder. No reply. I asked the Shaw. Ditto. I asked the mayor. "Your questions about a construction plan will have to be referred to town staff," he said. He told me to ask Nick Ruller, the chief admin guy. "Our manager of development planning can assist in providing this information," he said. Aimee Alderman will do it. But she didn't. Instead I heard from Marah Minor — the Karoline Leavitt of NOTL.

Yes, she said, "The town has received a traffic and construction mitigation

report, which identifies the time allotted for demolition and construction, as well as construction vehicle routes."

So, there is a plan after all.

But it hasn't been posted online. No copy has been given to elected officials. And the only way to see the report is to make a formal request, go to town hall and do so in controlled circumstances. That took me to Christopher Mazerolle, another staffer. And finally to the report.

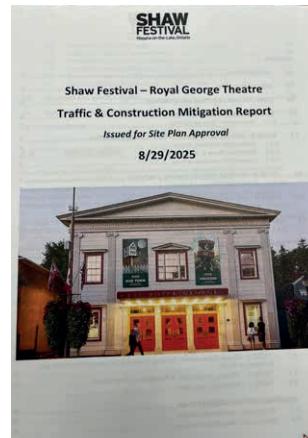
Man, it felt like I was Geraldo opening Al Capone's vault on live TV.

And what's in this vault?

Lots. The construction process has already been extended by three months from what Shaw told residents during the summer. The best case, the if-nothing-screws-up scenario, is 33 months. But, of course, stuff happens. So call it three years.

The process of demolishing a host of heritage buildings, digging a massive and deep hole and then constructing a 55,000-square-foot building (three times the Courthouse) in the middle of a residential area and our saturated commercial strip is complex. That's why the "mitigation" report runs close to 50 pages and is thick with detail.

Old Town residents — on Victoria, Prideaux, Simcoe and Queen — can expect up to 50 trucks per day during various phases of the project.



The master plan on how the \$80 million Royal George will be built — and the level of disruption the Old Town faces. GARTH TURNER

Dumps, flatbeds and tractor-trailers. A towering crane will offload steel and other materials from Victoria, which will be down to one lane most of the time. The sidewalk will be closed on one side. The boulevard used for storage. Parking on the other side will be removed during most construction days.

The report suggests several thousand truck trips will be necessary in total. Every single one will come down Mississauga Street, turn onto Queen and head to the heart of the downtown to the site. Every one will then move deeper into the residential area to get out and back to Mississauga.

Three route options are being considered, but all have problem corners and turns where tractor-trailer drivers will be forced to "swing wide." The current ban on big trucks — like

our heritage rules — goes poof.

The hundreds of workers and contractors on site will be asked not to park on residential streets in a 'hood that's already clogged with tourist vehicles. Shaw is suggesting they dump their pickups and vans a few block away — and carpool (have you ever seen a tradesguy in a carpool? I thought not).

In short, during construction times (mostly weekdays), Old Towners and merchants can expect to see a truck about every nine minutes. Until the summer of 2029. For most of that time, as well, the sidewalk on Queen Street will be closed and pedestrians forced to detour onto the road.

There's more. The "mitigation" report is detailed and definitive. It will take seven months to dig the hole and build to ground level (60 dump trucks per day then). Eleven months to erect the structure. Another 16 months to fabricate the interior. Four months to build the faux façade.

What now?

Town staff reviews it. The public does not. Council does not. Nobody votes on the plan. It gets reviewed, finalized and approved, Chris told me, at the director level.

And then they tell you.

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

garth@garth.ca

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Doug Ford's intellect is not up to the job

Dear editor:

As Prime Minister Mark Carney returns home after a significant trade agreement with China, Ontario Premier Doug Ford immediately finds fault.

The trade agreement in question allows China to export 49,000 Chinese electric vehicles, or EVs, to Canada, while Canadian farmers will be allowed to export canola seed to China, both at significantly reduced tariff rates.

Along comes Ford, politicking as usual, and casts



Ontario Premier Doug Ford.

himself as the defender of the Canadian auto worker. Sadly, his intellect does not allow him to understand the

nuanced strategies behind these agreements.

As U.S. President Donald Trump's crusade to have all North American cars manufactured exclusively in the U.S. proceeds, Canada needs to replace those defunct jobs. And, we have to start somewhere. Such as with Carney's recent trade agreement.

And, once the Chinese EVs provide an appetite for these products, the next step will be to have BYD, or some other Chinese car companies, open manufac-

turing and parts plants in Canada as Honda, Toyota and Hyundai have done.

And guess what? The sky hasn't fallen.

The hope is that Canadian auto workers can transition from Trump's fleeing American car companies to jobs provided by Chinese manufacturers.

It's hardly rocket science, Mr. Ford, but it does involve geopolitics and geo-economics, so perhaps someone can explain it to you.

J. Richard Wright
NOTL

Facts about the world of Canadian air defence

Dear editor:

As a former Royal Canadian Air Force pilot, I enjoyed the comments of your contributor about the coming fighter aircraft for the air force, even if the topic was a bit peculiar for a local newspaper ("Opinion: Canada, a.k.a. Venezuela North?" Jan. 8).

I wouldn't quibble too much about the facts presented that lead your contributor to his recommendation of an all Gripen E procurement. Well, maybe the F-35's requirement for

mixed nuts. Here are a few facts I think need to be added to the discussion.

The Department of National Defence directorate of aviation requirements has consistently and recently made it clear that the F-35 is the aircraft type that best meets Canada's defence requirements. The directorate of aviation requirement's assessment would have included existing data about short and unprepared field operation and system malfunctions for both the F-35

and the Gripen E.

To my knowledge, Canada has no strengthened highways similar to those in Nordic countries that are prepared and suitable for aviation use. The government already has a considerable investment in the F-35 and a contract that might be expensive to break.

The RCAF has a lengthy history of simultaneously flying more than one fighter aircraft type to meet national defence objectives. The operation of the CF-100

Canuck and CF-86 Sabre is one example. The CF-101 Voodoo and the CF-104 Starfighter is another.

Limiting the F-35 purchase to the number of aircraft in the existing contract and dedicating them to NORAD, or North American defence, makes sense to me. So too does negotiating a contract to acquire the Gripen E to signal our intent to align ourselves more closely with the Europeans.

Kenn Moody
St. Davids

Where have all the letters to the editor gone?

Dear editor:

Is it just me, or have the letters to the editor disappeared or been dramatically reduced?

I only occasionally see a letter signed from a NOTL resident now, which is very different from when I first moved here four years ago.

The remaining articles on the opinion pages are from the excellent columnists: Garth Turner, Brian Marshall, Steve McGuinness and various special features from David Israelson and J. Richard Wright.

What has happened to our local residents? They used

to have a lot of excellent, often differing, opinions on local matters.

The community was engaged and open to dialogue — do we now have other means of voicing our opinions, or have people stopped getting involved in a public way and if so, why?

Did something happen to stifle their voices?

Is freedom of speech and expression via our local newspaper being eroded in NOTL?

Just wondering what has happened.

Megan Wood
Old Town

Editor's note: It's not just you, Megan — we've noticed a decline in reader submissions, too. The reasons aren't entirely clear, though historically opinion writing slows down over the holidays. It may also reflect a broader desire to temporarily disengage from politics, especially given the relentless stream of troubling news from south of the border. Another factor may be the current climate of division: people may be increasingly reluctant to attach their names to their views out of concern it could create

personal or professional friction.

Whatever the cause, we continue to encourage readers of all perspectives to share their views. Thoughtful public debate benefits everyone, particularly when it takes place in a space with standards, accountability and proper editing — rather than on social media where people can hide behind fake names and anonymity.

The Lake Report continues to uphold a high standard of verification for its letter writers and does not publish anonymous opinions.

We welcome your letters

The Lake Report welcomes your letters to the editor. Please, write early and often. Letters ideally should be under 400 words long. Occasionally, longer letters may be published. All letters may be edited for conciseness, accuracy, libel and defamation. Please include your full name, street address and a daytime telephone number so that authorship can be authenticated. Only names and general addresses (e.g. Virgil, St. Davids, NOTL) will be published. Send your letters to editor@niagaranow.com or drop them by our office at 496 Mississauga St., NOTL.

This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style
Category: NOT TO BE CONFUSED

**Both delicious,
but don't confuse these two
cookies with similar names.**

Last issue category: Fictional Females

Clue: In a 1996 book her wedding gifts include a silver horse and three ancient dragon eggs.

Answer: Who is Daenerys Targaryen?

Answered first by: Bill Hamilton

Also answered correctly (in order) by:

Sue Rautenberg, Bob Wheatley, Becky Creager, Esther VanGorder, Jim Dandy, Lynda Collet, Jeff Lake, Margie Enns, Katie Reimer, Wade Durling, Donna Pearce, Sheila Meloche, Marla Percy, Jane Morris

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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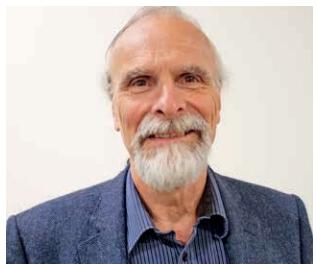
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OPINION

Questions about proceedings on Crysler-Burroughs house



ARCHITEXT

Brian Marshall
Columnist

I had hoped that, at least for the month of January, this column could focus on the positive side of the ledger and offer glimpses of options that might reinforce our town's character. Sadly, due to recent developments, that is not to be the case.

During the Jan. 14 meeting of the municipal heritage committee, an application was made for a heritage permit to allow the construction of a garage (with living space above) attached to the historic facade of the designated Crysler-Burroughs House at 187 Queen St., together with a driveway off Queen.

Now, let's take a moment to review past events vis-à-vis this property.

In the first half of 2024, the then-owner of the historic property, Rainer Hummel, submitted application

to facilitate the severance of one new vacant lot for future residential use, fronting Simcoe Street. On July 30 and Aug. 15 respectively, council and the committee of adjustment refused the applications.

Predictably, the owner filed appeals of these decisions with the Ontario Land Tribunal.

In September 2024, rather than defend the aforementioned decisions before the tribunal, council elected to direct the town's legal counsel to engage in mediation to reach a negotiated settlement with the appellant (applicant) with regard to these applications and present such settlement to the Ontario Land Tribunal.

In January last year, the settlement was presented to the Ontario Land Tribunal and the official decision of that body was published on April 9, 2025 (see: notl.com/media/6051). Said decision allowed for the severance of the historic property into two lots with site specific zoning and multiple negotiated provisions.

I would note that after careful review of this decision, it is my opinion that at no point in the document is there direction — specific or implied — that approval of a site plan (such a plan was not included in the at-



The Crysler-Burroughs House. FILE

achments to the decision) including any proposed garage is required by the town.

Further, the only mention of a driveway entrance off Queen Street is found in 1.1.12 of the decision, wherein it states that "the owner/applicant must obtain approval in the form of a municipal entrance permit from the town's operations department for a new driveway."

In other words, the approvals pursuant to a site plan on part two (the new lot containing the heritage building), which included an attached garage, and the introduction of a driveway off Queen Street remained solely in the hands of Niagara-on-the-Lake's town staff.

However, the decision does include, in part 1.1.5 (a), that the owner must acquire a heritage permit through the municipal heritage committee for "any alterations" (which would certainly include an attached garage) to the Part IV designated dwelling.

Oddly, in the Jan. 14 municipal heritage committee meeting, town staff's recommendation vis-à-vis the heritage permit application focused entirely on the design elements of the garage — not on the question of whether the garage attachment to the heritage asset's facade or the driveway off Queen Street should be permitted at all.

In fact, when this issue was queried by a member of the committee at one hour

27 minutes into the meeting, specifically asking about the site plan and the entrance off of Queen Street, the town's heritage planner stated: "It was part of the (tribunal) settlement, the application that was approved at the (tribunal). They got approval for entrance off of Queen Street and the (zoning bylaw) approvals as part of that settlement."

The member responded, "In other words, it is a done deal."

To which the heritage planner replied, "Yes."

This exchange clearly left the members of the municipal heritage committee under the mistaken impression that approval of both site plan and the driveway were a part of the Ontario Land Tribunal decision and therefore unchallengeable.

Whereas, in reality, these approvals had been generated by town staff and still required (per said tribunal decision) heritage permit recommendations through a municipal heritage committee vote to be taken after due deliberation and appropriate consideration of the impact on the designated property by the members of that committee.

It is also important to observe that there is an immense gulf between the site-specific zoning as

approved in the tribunal decision and actual site plan approval.

Several municipal processes related to proposed and undertaken alterations of this important heritage property have been fundamentally flawed since the Ontario Land Tribunal decision was rendered.

As such, it would behoove the elected members of town council to delay any decisions pursuant to applications on this property until it can be determined by independent third party review that the proceedings, to date, have either fulfilled all legal and statutory requirements or require correction to ensure compliance.

At a minimum, the application should be referred back to the municipal heritage committee with a complete and accurate staff recommendation encompassing whether, or not, a heritage permit should be approved for the proposed attached garage in its current form/location, and et al.

In my opinion, anything less would be an insult to the members of this committee and a slap in the face to Old Town voters.

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



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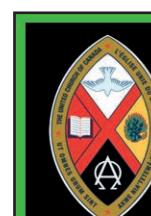
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Can we please stop talking about immigration?



ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson
Columnist

Immigration has been integral to our interesting and mostly peaceful Niagara. We stumble along and manage to coexist.

Yes, I read a lot. Too much, some say. Including an almost complete perusal of the New York Times once a week. So much information, following their mantra of "All the news that's fit to print" (not "Print all the news that will fit").

Everyone seems to agree that most of the current world news is negative, taking our moods down. I am trying my best to stop consuming the news of the world.

Permit me to quote Bruno Rodríguez, Cuba's foreign minister, who wrote that

Cuba has the right to import oil without interference. "Law and justice are on Cuba's side. The U.S. is behaving like a criminal and uncontrolled hegemon that threatens the peace and security not only of Cuba and this hemisphere but of the entire world."

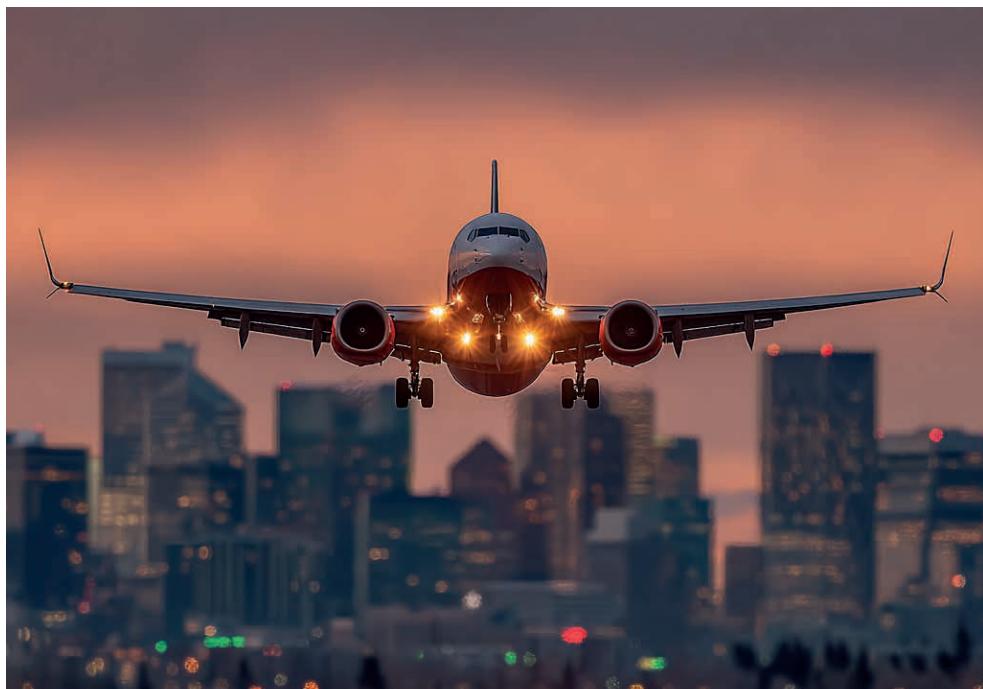
What a nice way to talk about your neighbour.

Heavy. Deep. I'll try to lighten up.

How can we still be debating the subject of immigration? Especially here in the new world, and specifically in Niagara? We have been so fortunate in so many ways. Our terroir, our physical location, surrounded by virtually limitless amounts of fresh water. A generally temperate climate. (Well, not this week.)

The families of the people in our agriculture sector emigrated from so many parts of the world. For different reasons. Religious and political persecution, and also, many of them were just plain hungry.

This week's Ramblings is veering way out of my usual lane. Normally I stay local,



Ross Robinson says people should welcome new Canadians and celebrate diversity of people and thought — after all, most of us are descendants of immigrants. MIDJOURNEY

sometimes with a message, perhaps with a touch of humour. But for a variety of reasons, the recent news cycles have been all over immigration, deportation, refugees and shifting the borders of sovereign nations.

I love to be amongst people from a variety of backgrounds. Earlier today I had a look at the list of the recent lord mayors of

Niagara-on-the-Lake. All well-meaning and hard-working, and I believe each of them did their best to make our home town a better place to live.

To list just a few, Jim Marino, Mike Dietsch, Stan Ignatczyk, and my first lord mayor, Art Viola. Arturo and his wife, Julie, had immigrated to Canada from the Philippines via

America, and they made a real contribution to our Niagara.

Art's guiding principles were respect and collaboration. This is such a contrast to the attitudes of today. At all levels of government. Negativity, nitpicking, mudslinging, accusations of wrong doing, threatened lawsuits and on and on.

I really think that, without exception, our NOTL councillors are working hard, in good faith.

Since I am way out of my normal lane, let me take it a step further, into a discussion of inclusivity. Way back to 1963, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s unforgettable "I have a dream" speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C.

I have studied this brave and eloquent speech and its impact on history. Dr. King said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character."

Bringing this Ross's Ramblings to a conclusion, I will again say I am not a philosopher or a historical scholar. Just an amateur scribbler. My thoughts are only my thoughts.

I hope I sometimes encourage readers to think and communicate.

Going forward, our world needs our help. Be kind.

rossrocket9@gmail.com

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Is the town trying to administratively frustrate people?

Dear editor:

In the Jan. 15 issue of The Lake Report, Stuart McCormack, president of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association, wrote an article about the meaning of the engineer's iron ring — an article without apparent purpose and one that looked out of place what with all the trials and tribulation articles involving town council's decisions and town staff's recommendations ("Letter: The meaning behind the engineer's iron ring").

I believe Mr. McCormack was actually reminding the recently appointed Jordan Frost, P.Eng. (appointed as director of public works and infrastructure) of his ethical responsibility and the humility denoted by the iron ring he wears.

The NOTL Residents Association is somewhat built on the idea that town council, for the most part, approves the recommendations of town staff, and if you can convince town staff



Letter writer Gienek Ksiazkiewicz says he's frustrated town staff and councillors seem to not respect or care about experts opinions if they're held by residents. FILE

that its recommendations can be constructively modified through solid fact-based intelligent arguments, then a positive workable alliance is achieved with outcomes that are both acceptable to the residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake and town council. A win/win for everyone in a friendly open forum.

Mr. Frost may be mandated with identifying the deficiencies and issues in both past and future real

estate development applications filled with developers' self advocating story lines. But, perhaps that aspect of his job description is absent, diluted or amorphous, and he will not be opining on the risk attributes of developments from a holistic perspective with the same intensity as one might hope.

We don't know, and as they say time will tell — perhaps by the fall? A fall juncture where the NOTL

municipal elections will be upon us.

In the meantime, the experiences of Mr. Steve McGuinness (referencing his Jan. 15 article, "The Forum: Future councils will inherit a colossal financial mess"), Ron Simkus (Parliament Oaks et al.), Kip Voege (St. Davids/Tawny Ridge's infrastructure issues), and many others (too many to list herein), haven't historically experienced the congenial logical fact-based discussions that people (had) hope(d) to achieve with town council/staff.

Input is not received well, and public presentations are seemingly there for optics — for council to say that the public had been consulted, but have their presentations been really considered/analysed or factored into council's decision-making process?

What meaningful changes have resulted from all of these public presentations? Perhaps town council can list out some of the

resident's important/major recommendations that were implemented, or those that were not implemented? I doubt that they will oblige.

Requests for access to the town's public documents that could confirm the existence of a variety of problematic items related to council's decisions, such as infrastructure deficiencies (documents which town council and town staff should have reviewed when they did their due diligence and subsequent approvals) are rebuffed/seemingly withheld.

Town staff have declined to provide this kind of information referring the individual to the clerks department to discuss a Freedom of Information Act request, or leaving no alternative but to file a request under the Freedom of Information Act.

It appears that the town wants to administratively frustrate individuals who wish to review what should be public documents. Is this

to be regarded as a strategy to obfuscate short-sighted/poor decision-making, or something else?

So, what do you do when town council/staff don't really want to accept your educated, well-thought-out facts/ideas aimed at improving the quality of the decision-making through a constructive methodological process, and instead it appears council/staff view these facts/ideas as possibly some sort of challenge to their authority or to the rationale behind their decision-making? Agreeing with residents might be tantamount to admitting inadequate due diligence?

The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.

Well, do you keep trying to put more lipstick on in the hopes that date night will turn out better, or do you forget about the lipstick approach?

Gienek Ksiazkiewicz
St. Davids

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U.S. tariffs push Niagara vendors to NOTL pop-up record show

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

A record show at Royal Canadian Legion Branch 124 last Saturday gave vinyl fans a reason to browse and buy close to home as cross-border tariffs and shipping costs squeeze online sellers.

The pop-up show was organized by Legion board member Chrystal Haverstock to raise money through door donations and connect local “vinyl junkies,” as she calls them, with a small group of vendors.

For Simon Vaughn, a vendor and DJ who lives three blocks from the Legion, the event reflected a hard shift in how he makes sales, directly affected by the ongoing U.S.-Canada trade war.

“With the tariffs being a minimum of 30 per cent on what we sell, there’s not really much room for profit,” said Vaughn.

Vaughn said he and his partner are “retired online resellers” after pulling



Customers peruse vinyls at the Branch 124 record show on Sunday. ANDREW HAWLITZKY

their shop, Chasing Nostalgia, because the numbers stopped working.

“My market went from being pretty big to very small ... if you want me to ship you a CD, it’s going to cost \$25 Canadian. Nobody wants to pay that,” said Vaughn.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Mark Carney told the World Economic Forum

in Davos, Switzerland, that “great powers” are using economic integration as “weapons,” while referencing “American hegemony” regarding the ongoing trade war.

Vaughn said costs have changed what makes sense for sellers, pushing them toward local networking and pop-ups instead of relying on online orders.

He is lining up consignment plans with White Whale in Niagara Falls and the Apothecary candy store on King Street in St. Catharines, with potential work with Vintage Venture in Niagara Falls. He said he also has a future pop-up planned at Limited Distillery in Virgil.

The first pop-up at the Branch 124 on Dec. 21

drew 105 people and raised \$455. Though the Legion initially hesitated on committing to the record show, said Haverstock, it ultimately received a positive reception.

“This is not something that everybody understands ... it’s very specific and clients are hard collectors. But people will travel and they will go anywhere to get this stuff,” said Haverstock.

Vaughn said lower-cost events continue to matter more as shoppers watch their budgets.

“Shows that are affordable, like \$20 and under, [are] amazing, because everybody knows the economy’s not rich, and people are having a hard time now more than ever,” said Vaughn.

Barry Grant, a Brock University professor selling from his personal collection, said he has been doing it for years to get music into the hands of people who value it.

“I think people like the

‘warmer’ sound of vinyl as opposed to digital sound,” he said.

Grant said buyers are not only returning to the format, but often searching for different music than past collectors. He was pleased to see people of all ages coming out to buy physical records.

Dana Kadikoff, another vendor, said physical records offer something streaming does not.

“Vinyl is back. Everybody’s collecting it again, and they got to have that in their hand,” said Kadikoff.

Volunteer Genevieve Habib said the Legion also used the show to promote free memberships for 2026, the branch’s 100th year.

“You don’t have to be a Legionnaire or a family member. It’s open to everybody now,” said Genevieve Habib, volunteer.

The next record show is set for March 1 at the Optimist Centre in St. Catharines from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., with \$5 admission.

andrew@niagaranow.com



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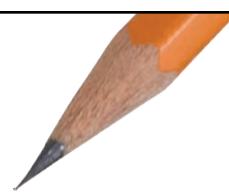
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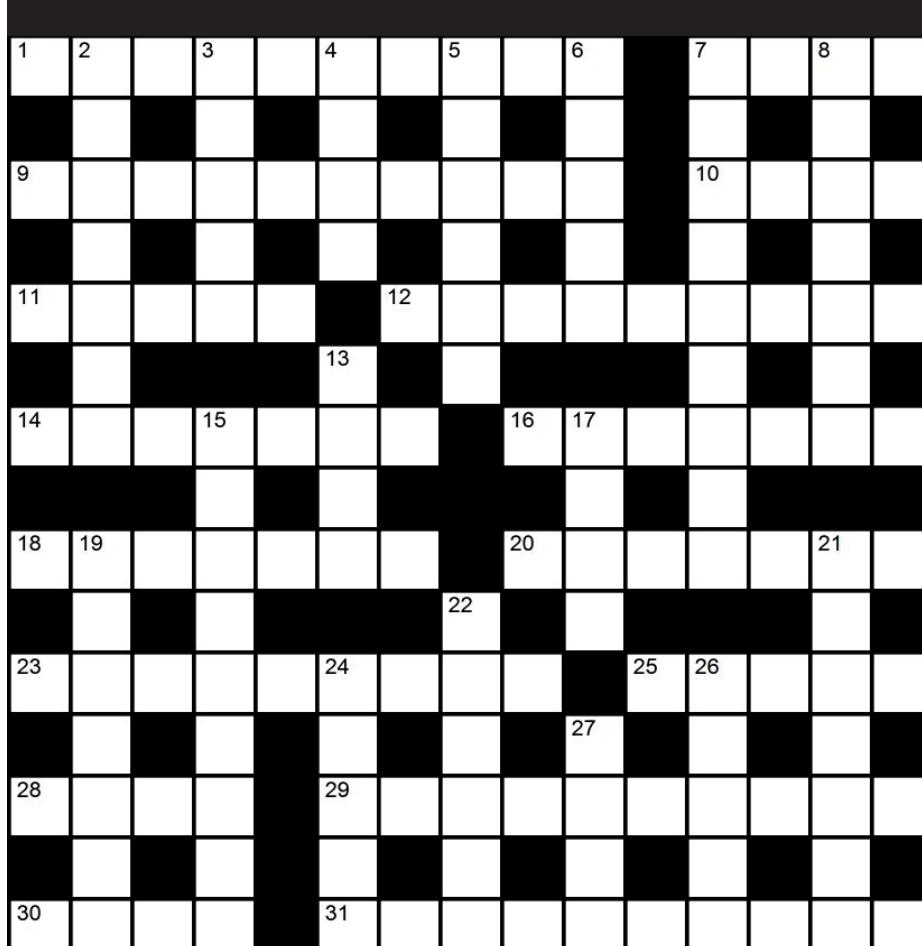
Across

1. Sheets and blankets (10)
7. Unfortunately (4)
9. Partly unrelated female sibling (10)
10. Grain husks (4)
11. Investigate closely (5)
12. Of no value (9)
14. Dog-houses (7)
16. Altar cloth (7)
18. Cases (7)
20. Implore urgently (7)
23. Inflammation of the stomach (9)
25. Wading bird (5)
28. Form of wrestling (4)
29. Beyond the power of Man (10)
30. Hay store (4)
31. The lot (10)

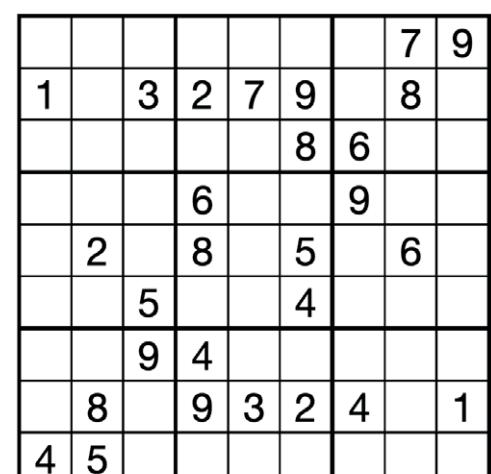
Down

2. Qualify (7)
- 3 Managed (5)
4. Leave out (4)
5. Frankfurter (3,3)
6. Small fish (5)
7. Vehicle for injured people (9)
8. Formerly the world's fourth largest lake (4,3)
13. Stop up a hole (4)
15. Wee Willie Winkie's attire (9)
17. Grass (4)
19. Sea north of Australia (7)
21. Hanging cloth (7)
22. Baby's feeding bottle cap (6)
24. Point in question (5)
26. Not easily broken (5)
27. Salver (4)

Crossword Puzzle



Last issue's answers



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EXPLORING HISTORY
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300 years of Fort Niagara

Whether you're enjoying the view during a round at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Course or looking out over the water from Queen's Royal Park, Fort Niagara has long been a landmark across the river. In 2026, one of its most iconic buildings, the French Castle, marks an impressive milestone — 300 years since its construction. As the oldest standing building in the Great Lakes basin, the French Castle has guarded the mouth of the Niagara River, a waterway that has long connected Indigenous nations and, later, it became a meeting place for trade, diplomacy and conflict between nations. Over the centuries, the fort has been controlled by the French, British and Americans and played an important role in the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Through it all, Fort Niagara has remained a striking landmark and, to this day, it serves as a reminder of how the river has always connected communities on both shores.



Nobel Prize in chemistry might change world of aviation



DR. BROWN

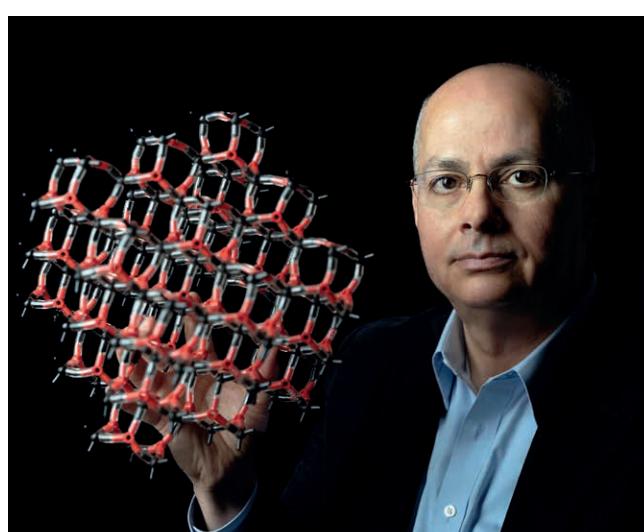
Dr. William Brown
Columnist

Up to now, the solution has been to compress hydrogen gas to pack far more energy into a space convenient enough for a vehicle. Hydrogen gas can be compressed to 5,000 to 10,000 psi — 50 to 100 times that of the air pressure in our bike and car tires. In this form, hydrogen gas works for big vehicles, but not cars.

The other option has been to store hydrogen as a liquid at very low temperatures: minus. That may work for larger vehicles, but again, not cars. Both compression and liquefaction are wasteful and not cheap: compression wastes up to 20 per cent of the stored hydrogen energy and liquefaction may be associated with “boil off,” which may consume up to 50 per cent of the energy.

Another option is to store hydrogen in solid form in metal hydrides, but this requires temperatures up to 300 degrees centigrade to release the gas. In short, none of the foregoing options are attractive because they’re wasteful, bulky and tricky to manage.

Enter Omar Yaghi, a Nobel laureate in chemistry in 2025 and his brilliant solution for using hydrogen to fuel aircraft, which was highlighted by Graham



Chemist Omar Yaghi won the Nobel Prize in 2025 in chemistry for finding a way to use hydrogen to fuel aircraft — a planet-friendly source of energy. WIKIMEDIA

Warwick in the November 2025 issue of the commercial aviation magazine, *Aviation Week & Space Technology*.

What Yaghi and his co-laureates, Richard Robson and Susumu Kitagawa, created were three-dimensional molecules, metal-organic frameworks, which combined metals such as copper, cobalt, nickel or zinc with organic compounds to create containers divided by labyrinthine internal spaces to increase the internal surface area.

One of Yaghi’s recent devices increased the internal surface area of a metal-organic frameworks by a factor of 7,000 times,

making it a practical way to store large quantities of hydrogen at near normal temperatures and pressures — and, scaled up, enough to provide safe hydrogen fuel tanks for commercial aircrafts.

For at least a decade now, there has been considerable interest in Europe, the U.S. and China in developing a lithium-ion (Li-ion) battery-powered commuter aircraft for short routes within or between neighboring cities. The problem is range and complexity and, as with most electric vehicles, the cost to the environment isn’t seen by the operator — it comes when Li-ion batteries need to be

recycled or disposed with.

Yaghi’s suggestion makes far more sense to me than Li-ion batteries, because hydrogen is a clean fuel and there’s nothing nasty to dispose of like Li batteries at the end of the shelf-life of the battery. The fact that hydrogen can be stored in a near-solid and readily accessible form — all at normal operating altitudes and pressures — are huge pluses.

The focus of Yaghi and his team has been on drones, but if the promise of safe storage of useful amounts of fuel can be scaled up to commercial aircrafts, it would be a game-changer for an aviation industry looking for a way forward to cheaper and much cleaner fuels.

Similar technology can be used to capture carbon dioxide, methane and other toxic gases and fluids, cleaning water supplies, extracting water from dry dessert air — the list goes on.

The whole exercise with metal-organic frameworks began with Richard Robson 40 years ago in Australia, teaching students how atoms link up to form molecules. They created complex molecules with large interior spaces with few practical applications

in mind at the time.

Later, Susumu Kitagawa created the first metal-organic frameworks molecules with practical applications in mind, but his work wasn’t taken seriously enough at that stage to garner reliable funding.

It was left to Omar Yaghi, born and raised in Jordan and later a U.S. citizen, who had the vision and determination to apply rational design to assemble atoms and molecules like Lego pieces to make large flexible crystals with enormous interior surface areas.

He and his team have gone on to exploit metal-organic frameworks technology to today’s level, in which growth in metal-organic frameworks technology and practical applications is now exponential.

Here was an example of the evolution of a novel technology in the hands of the three laureates in chemistry who reimagined how atoms and molecules might be arranged to the eventual advantage of humankind — one of the core goals of all Nobels in the sciences.

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.



FEATURED



Chrislyn D'Sylva Pires is set to take part in the Against All Odds competition on Jan. 27. Her daughter, who has a neuromuscular disability, competed in 2023. DAN SMEENK

Inspired by her daughter's health journey, NOTLer becomes competitive speaker

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Chrislyn D'Sylva Pires has had an eventful journey as the parent of a daughter with a neuromuscular disability and now hopes to share her story after her daughter found the courage to tell hers.

Chrislyn will take part in Speaker Slam's 10th annual Against All Odds competition in Toronto on Jan. 27, marking her first public speaking appearance.

She will compete against nine other speakers, each given five minutes to persuade a panel of four judges. Judges assess speakers on six criteria: message clarity, storytelling, transformative quality, entertainment, presentation and "it" factor.

Chrislyn's daughter, Lauren Pires, is now a professional speaker after years of working in the non-profit sector. Lauren first shared her story publicly in 2023 at the same competition, speaking about being diagnosed with a neuromuscular disability in her early 20s.

She entered the competition after turning 30, and it marked the first time she spoke publicly about her life. Chrislyn said the experience "changed her life."

Lauren won her first round and placed second in the Grand Slam final, the competition's culminating event held near the end of

the year.

After watching her daughter's success, Chrislyn decided it was her turn to step onto the same stage.

"I always knew, 'Now, it's going to be my turn,'" she said.

Although she has never spoken publicly before, Chrislyn said the event gives her a powerful reason to push past that fear.

"The intention for me is to share the story," she said. "It's not totally about winning."

Lauren had a difficult birth and was admitted to the neonatal intensive care unit. Doctors could not identify her condition at the time, and Chrislyn and her husband were repeatedly told their daughter might not survive.

Lauren did survive, but now lives with a disability that leaves her with about 33 per cent of the muscle power of an average person. At the time, Chrislyn was studying for her master of business administration at the Schulich School of Business and working as a financial analyst.

She eventually put her career on hold to care for her daughter.

"She wasn't thriving when I wasn't (there)," she said.

"I look back and I think it was the best thing I could've done with my life."

The family, which includes Lauren's brother, grew up in Brampton. After Lauren graduated from high

school, they later moved to Switzerland for a period of time.

Lauren took a gap year between high school and university while in Switzerland, a country Chrislyn said posed challenges for someone with a neuromuscular disability because of its mountainous terrain. It took four months to find suitable housing.

Lauren later returned to Canada to attend the University of Guelph, marking the first time she lived independently, although her grandparents lived about 20 minutes away.

She now lives in Mississauga.

Chrislyn said one memory from the time Lauren was fighting for her life continues to guide her. At the Hospital for Sick Children, or SickKids, she saw a board listing children who had survived serious illness, which gave her hope.

"I always thought, 'If we survive this, we're going to need to give hope to other people in that situation,'" she said.

Chrislyn believes sharing Lauren's survival story can help others facing similar challenges.

"She's definitely proven and shown me that I do have courage," she said.

Tickets for the event are available at speakerslam.org/events.

daniel@niagaranow.com

Obituary & In Memoriam

Maureen Pospiech



POSPIECH, Maureen, Elizabeth (Donihee)—

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Maureen on January 12, 2026, at the Greater Niagara General Hospital, at the age of 78.

Beloved wife of the late Bruce (2019) of 48 years.

Devoted mother of Matthew (Sarah), Daniel (Courtney) and Kathleen. Adored grandmother of Nicholas (Cheyenne). Dear sister of Barbara Donihee (Robert Graham), and sister-in-law of Ruth (Glenn) Hunter. Fondly remembered by her nieces; Wendy (Ken) Stewart, Jolene Ellwood, Amanda, and nephew Raymond (Tracey) Hunter, and by many friends.

Born in Cornwall, ON, in 1947. In 1971 Maureen married the love of her life, Bruce, and they settled in Virgil in the home of her dreams; the original farmhouse on the creek, which Bruce rebuilt to suit their growing family. Maureen greatly enjoyed her perennial garden, which Bruce planted and she "tended". Her greatest joy, however, was her children. She was a hockey and lacrosse mom and served on the executives of both. Lacrosse was her favorite, though, and insisted that loud cheering was part of the game. She loved the summer tournaments, and the camping that came with it, surrounded by other players, and their families, that strong ties were made there.

In keeping with Maureen's wishes, cremation has taken place. A celebration of life will be announced and held at a later date. As an expression of sympathy, those who wish may make a memorial donation to Niagara-on-the-Lake Minor Lacrosse. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at www.morganfuneral.com.

*You can shed tears that she is gone
Or you can smile because she has lived
You can close your eyes and pray she will come back
Or you can open your eyes and see all that she has left
Your heart can be empty because you can't see her
Or you can be full of love that you shared
You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday
Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday
You can remember her and only that she is gone
Or you can cherish her memory and let it live on
You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back
Or you can do what she would want: smile, open your eyes, love and go on.*

MacKenzie King



May 16, 1995- January 22, 2021

"No matter how I spend my days or what I do, there isn't any morning or night when I don't think of you."

- Tom and Blakely

*For obituary and memorial inquiries,
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