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**Contributed by Patty Garriock**

“Always go with the choice that scares you the most – because that’s the one that is going to require the most from you.” - Caroline Myss

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Call 905.359.2270 or send an email to editor@niagaranow.com

## Virgil fireworks a sight to see



The Virgil Business Association outdid itself again this year on the Virgil Stampede fireworks display. They seemed to last forever and spectators were hooting and hollering in excitement. RICHARD HARLEY

## Editorial

### Commitment to tax rentals is a good first step

Richard Harley  
 Editor-In-Chief

Niagara-on-the-Lake is finally going to make short-term rentals charge the same two per cent accommodation tax as hotels do.

Although the town is taking its time, giving rental operators a generous seven months to prepare, it’s a win for the town.

As we have said repeatedly in editorials about short-term rentals, it means more revenue and a leveling of the playing field for hotel operators who have been obligated to charge the tax to their guests since July 2022.

It means a fairer system and it was the right thing to do.

This paper has been vocal in advocating for the tax, especially after our research in 2021 found that just 12

of 255 short-term rentals would be subject to the tax under rules set out by the town’s council at the time.

Good work on the commitment, councillors. It’s about time, to be frank.

Now, let’s ensure all rentals are taxed, no matter how many rooms they have, and figure out how to use the income, while also looking into a temporary rezoning strategy for unhosted rentals.

Coun. Gary Burroughs’ suggestion that a committee be established to oversee the use of the funds is a good idea. We hope the people on that committee come to the table with open minds.

The money is meant to be used to support tourism and tourism-related activities and infrastructure.

We’ve said this also many times before: In Niagara-on-the-Lake, that could be

just about anything, because almost all paths lead to NOTL’s tourism industry in some form or fashion.

For example: It could be used to help restore and beautify the Niagara Baptist Church Burial Ground in the way that Voices of Freedom Park has been turned into a lovely testament to NOTL’s Black heritage and history.

Or it could be used to fill pot holes near Newark Park.

Almost anything can be justified — maybe even legal fees for protecting the town’s built heritage, which is a major tourism draw.

Smart thinking allows the money to be spent wisely instead of using it on only the obvious tourism-related activities like marketing and festivals. Although some of the revenue can be used for those things, too.

The town estimates the

income from expanding the tax to be about \$600,000.

It might be even more than that. And one way or another, that’s money taxpayers don’t have to spend.

If the town is to bring back a short-term rental committee as Burroughs suggests, then council must ensure it is not once again overpowered by industry stakeholders.

It must have equal representation from residents, including ones who are not happy with the current system of managing unhosted rentals.

And it should go without saying that it should not take another year for the town to raise its accommodation tax to four per cent.

It’s a plan that has already been suggested and accepted and it could be done at the same seven-month marker. Or sooner.

## 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 (eg. 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.

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Reader Greg Hope took these photos of buildings in need of repair downtown. He wonders why nothing is being done to fix the damage. SUPPLIED

# Rotting wood, peeling paint plague Old Town shops

Dear editor:  
I am a newer resident, having lived here for 18 months, and want to express my concerns about the slow disintegration of some downtown Niagara-on-the-Lake storefronts and buildings.

I used to visit here before and I don't recall the disrepair of buildings to this degree. Many of the storefronts have rotting wood or aggressively peeling paint around windows, doors and siding. It is in many buildings.

Clearly it has taken years to get to this state. I don't know if it's the property owner not doing the the maintenance or the business that is supposed to be doing it as part of a lease agreement, but it certainly is being neglected.

What the store owners and businesses are forgetting to realize is that this neglect is seen by every tourist and potential customer walking by. Maybe they come this year, but may think to themselves and tell their friends that this place is going downhill and not worth the visit again?

I am not picking on any stores in particular, but here are a few examples.

The Bank of Montreal building's window ledges have rotting wood and peeling paint in several places including near the sign. It has been neglected for years.

I am a BMO customer and a few months ago I went in to speak to the manager, but she was busy so I spoke to an employee about how it looks. She said she

never noticed – and I said, "Maybe you work here and just walk by and don't think about it."

The building is nice and fancy inside and care has been taken to make sure the customers have a nice place to visit. But what about the presentation outside?

We know BMO cares about its reputation, but somehow in this historic district its business front is looking shabby.

You would think here in NOTL, especially, they would want to get it right. I left my name and number for the manager to call and never heard back. As of a few days ago no repairs had been done.

Other examples: Greaves Jams' building is missing paint in many areas of the storefront. At the Shiny

Company the wood is decaying so badly around the window areas that it appears to be completely gone. I inquired and was told they were hoping to get something done but not in the immediate future.

Even the Shaw ticket office has stucco falling off and missing from the side of the sales office. If you look at the Pillar and Post's sign at the corner of John and King, it is so rotten it looks like it may fall apart soon.

And the beautiful metal fence around the house there is all rusting as it hasn't been painted in many years.

I walk my dog in the Commons near Butler's Barracks and sticking out like a sore thumb is the horrible shape of the two old military buildings

there beside the one Parks Canada building that is maintained.

Both buildings are a mess of peeling paint and rotted doors and windows. No doubt animals can get inside.

I asked the manager there why these two buildings are not maintained and he didn't have a good answer, saying it was too expensive to do a full repair, so they just sit for now.

He said it would cost \$4 million to have the buildings brought back, a figure that sounded bizarre to me. This could have been avoided with regular painting and maintenance.

If you let things go, it costs so much more in the end. Again, what must tourists from other countries think? That Canada cannot

even preserve its heritage? It is embarrassing.

I am not trying to pick on any specific business because the problems are everywhere. If I notice this, wouldn't many of the visitors also? And do they speak to their friends and says it's not worth coming here again? It really could lead to a slow erosion of tourism.

As a regular reader of The Lake Report, paper I see the people up in arms about many things, such as new builds and how they won't fit into the character of this beautiful town.

Shouldn't they and the business owners be concerned about the shape of the downtown core and its disintegration?

*Greg Hope*  
NOTL

# We need to persuade Doug Ford to stop privatized health care

Dear editor:  
I had a hip replacement in 2016, a successful procedure after a wait of a couple of months.

Now, we have the enactment of Bill 60, where the Ontario government is

opening hospital services to private and for-profit companies.

Previously this government limited wages for medical personnel, including nurses, who we know were overworked.

Remember how we tried to encourage them with banging of saucepans?

If I were a nurse – tired, overworked and underpaid – I would be very tempted to try the private sector.

If many do this imagine

how much more understaffed the public system will be.

What is the result?

If you can afford it, you go private (at least \$40,000 for a hip replacement before inflation took hold) or else you wait and wait.

The condition can only get worse (remember the lad with curvature of the spine?) or perhaps you die. Then you only have funeral expenses.

Is it possible to persuade Premier Doug Ford that we do not want private care

overtaking a public system, which could be an example to the continent?

If only he was in touch with what Ontarians actually want, instead of just his rich pals.

*Cynthia Rand*  
NOTL



## BEYOND THE MIST

Join us at the NOTL Museum for a panel discussion on Niagara's Indigenous history. June 8 | 7 p.m. | Tickets at notlmuseum.ca.

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NIAGARA PARKS



# Taking inventory of NOTL's built heritage homes



Brian Marshall  
Columnist

For nearly five decades, my partner and beloved wife has been my muse, my inspiration and my grounding influence.

It is due to her providing a "court of sober second thought" that some of my most audacious concepts have been realized and I owe her more than can possibly be expressed in words.

She, as much as I (being a mere source of subject expertise and scribbler of words), is responsible for the subject matter of this column.

And, so it was once again over this morning's coffee when I floated my thoughts for this week's topic, she suggested that it was past time to provide Arch-i-text readers with some insight into the progress of the built-heritage inventory project that had been initiated in this column on March 2 of this year, "A call to action to protect NOTL's built heritage, and more."

Because, as she pointed out, one cannot cherish nor protect something they do not know they have.

More than 25 residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake volunteered to assist in this undertaking and, having determined to begin by locating all the "old" houses in the rural areas of town, each set off to survey one or more of the 15 defined districts.

These volunteers traversed every road and street in their district on the hunt for dwellings that might pre-date 1925.

As each district was completed, the findings were forwarded to a central pool and, from there, the build date of each identified house was determined using the MPAC (Municipal Property Assessment Corp.) database.

Finally, using the same database, a thorough property-by-property examination of the entire district was conducted in an attempt to capture the historic domiciles that might have been "disguised" by renovations.

Now, it must be said that MPAC build dating is often inaccurate, particularly with respect to 19th-century homes.

However, in the main, the dating falls on the conservative side (e.g. the Durham-Slingerland House has an MPAC build date of 1870 whereas we know that it is actually circa 1840) and hence can be considered a reasonable reference for identifying builds that occurred prior to 1925.

For surety, each house so identified was subjected to a visual architectural assess-



One of the seven surviving John D. Larkin Craftsman houses in NOTL. BRIAN MARSHALL

ment, in some cases augmented by limited research, to verify it fell before the point of demarcation.

As of this writing, 14 of the 15 rural districts have been inventoried, with only the smallest yet to be processed and the current rural inventory of historic houses stands at 284.

Insofar as the settlement areas are concerned, St. Davids has been inventoried but is awaiting our two historians' inquiries regarding build dating of several buildings that MPAC has no data on and the Queenston inventory is now underway.

Upon completion of the final rural district, Virgil is next on the docket and then we will turn our attention to Old Town.

All that said, this undertaking has uncovered

numerable fascinating and, in some cases, disturbing finds.

Speaking to the latter, my list of threatened historic houses has lengthened. In past columns I have spoken to the vacant, boarded-up circa 1850 stone Regency at 512 Carlton St. and more recently the circa 1900 Arts & Crafts and circa 1857 Georgian (55 and 49 Queenston Rd. respectively) slated for demolition by the province to make way for the expansion of the Skyway bridge.

We can add to this the circa 1903 house at 240 East and West Line. The Town would like to see it gone because of its proximity to a watercourse.

Also there is the circa 1920 Arts & Crafts home at 1996 Four Mile Creek Rd.; the circa 1890 (or

earlier) vernacular farmhouse at 815 Concession 6 Rd.; the circa 1880 Ontario Gothic farmhouse at 897 Concession 7 Rd.; the vernacular Hall & Parlour folk house, circa 1890 (and likely much earlier) at 1132 Line 9 Rd.; and, the glorious circa 1870 dwelling at 1893 York Rd., which is completely constructed of Grimsby red sandstone, with Queenston limestone appointments. This home would be a crying shame to lose.

On a more positive note, there are the surviving seven Craftsman houses that John D. Larkin of Buffalo caused to be built in 1908 as dwellings for his employees (Mr. Larkin owned 1,900 acres in NOTL at the beginning of the 20th century).

Of concrete construction, the exteriors of six of these

houses are largely as-built with bell-curved, hipped roofs and graceful porches speaking to a time when the relationship between employer and employee was different than that of today.

Three of these houses front on Niagara River Parkway (#15306, 15316 and 15322) while the other four are on Line 6 Road just off the Parkway at #1569, 1573, 1577 and 1581. (I must mention that one of our intrepid volunteer couples owns 1577 and has done a smashing job ensuring its preservation and restoration)

Then, out at 765 Four Mile Creek Rd., is, to my knowledge, the only surviving Italianate house in NOTL. While over the years it has lost its original eaves and eave brackets on the main massing (although these are preserved on the sidewall bay), it still proclaims many of the elements of the style.

Several as-built Second Empire homes have been identified and among a significant smattering of Ontario Gothic farmhouses are several with two and even three front-facing gable wall dormers; I guess if one was good, more was better.

I encourage you to take a drive in the country where our built heritage survives and is (largely) well.

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



## Isn't having more health care options a **good thing** for Ontarians?

Dear editor:

I am writing regarding the May 11 story, "Health coalition launches referendum to stop Ford's expansion of private clinics."

I have a few questions and comments in regards to this topic (which seems to have taken on a life of its own).

First the question: will the coalition's planned referendum offer people a chance to vote "for" or "against" or just "against" health care system changes?

We have a huge crisis regarding access to care and services. Many of the long wait time procedures affect older people. This will only get worse as our population ages.

Because our system is "free for all" (but truly we pay for this through our very high taxes), there is no way it can be perfect and easily accessible. It definitely needs help. Doing nothing is not an option.

Having another layer of specialty services outside of the hospital scene should be, or could be, both cost-effective and offer more access to more people.

But the third-party element is of concern to doctors. Can this not be minimized or supervised instead of just dismissing it?

There are already many private clinics – if you want to call them that. Many of



Writer Carroll Baker doesn't see any problem with Doug Ford's push for privatized health care in Ontario. FILE

us have been to a clinic for a colonoscopy, eye exams, cataract surgery and the dermatologist. The Shoul-dice Hospital in Thornhill is a world-renowned facility for hernia operations.

When you actually think about your doctor's office (if you are lucky enough to have one), they operate much like a private clinic.

The doctors all have to pay their own business

costs, rent, salaries, supplies etc. and then bill OHIP for the time when they see you, the patient. Many doctors also provide (for a fee) services that are not covered by OHIP.

What is so wrong with having a surgeon have a clinic where all he or she does every day is knee surgery, for example?

There could be huge advantages because you would increase the number of doctors who could choose these specialties and therefore the calibre of care goes way up. But the big upside would be accessibility.

If we think a two-tier health care system is not already in place, we are

dreaming. I did not know until recently that one can in fact go to another province to pay for a surgery that you cannot access here because of long wait times.

And Ontario doctors can also be paid for services by patients not covered by OHIP.

But that is not what is really under discussion here. We are talking about increasing access to services we already provide, so we don't have to look elsewhere. I see no downside.

But it is a complex issue and I am sure I am not the only one who does not fully understand it.

*Carroll Baker  
NOTL*





# Safer cycling infrastructure needed in Niagara

Dear editor:

As lawyers for injured cyclists and grieving families, we were devastated to learn that a cyclist was killed Saturday May 21 in Niagara. While details remain limited, this incident follows another cyclist killed two days earlier in Burlington.

Both collisions happened near highway overpasses.

Major highways that divide municipalities are treacherous for pedestrians and cyclists to traverse. A Kitchener cyclist recently referred to the highway through that municipality as the Berlin Wall.

We know safe infrastructure for vulnerable road users is lacking where this

person was killed, at Stanley Avenue and the 405.

There are no separated bike lanes, despite it being located close to Queenston Heights Park, the Botanical Gardens, Niagara River trails, and several bike tour operators and bike rental companies.

On top of that, crossing over the 405 at this location is confusing. On one side is a painted white line with enough room for what could be a bike lane.

However, the other side of the road doesn't have the same shoulder – in either case, paint is not safe infrastructure.

It is amazing safe infrastructure is not already a

feature of this developed area. Perhaps that would have saved this cyclist's life.

We know that the cost of building safe infrastructure is outweighed by the cost of death and injury that can result from its absence.

The weight of this preventable tragedy will burden his family for years to come. The cost of losing another person on our roads will certainly be high, not only for his loved ones but for the community he contributed to, his employer and the justice system.

Out of our Hamilton office we represent a Niagara-area cyclist seriously injured by a driver who

failed to yield near to a popular winery. Our client spent months recovering in hospital in Niagara. We must act to prevent these tragedies.

Niagara boasts a hearty tourism industry that in many cases encourages cycling.

That encouragement must be accompanied by safe cycling routes and investments in infrastructure that keep vulnerable road users safe. Cycling is a boon to the region's economy and it is incumbent on local governments to invest in safe cycling.

**Dave Shellnutt**  
*The Biking Lawyer LLP*  
Hamilton



Lawyer Dave Shellnutt says Niagara needs to have safer routes for cyclists. SUPPLIED

# Developers need to commit to a vision of NOTL's uniqueness

Dear editor:

I read, with interest and some despair, Bonita Cawker's May 18 letter, "NOTL is growing and that means more development."

I believe we are facing a much bigger issue than merely NIMBY vs "development is going to happen, just get on with it."

I also believe the group voicing concern is not a small minority of the population, certainly not in the conversations I have had with people.

I am not a member of any group on either side of the discussion but there seems to be a large, diverse cross-section of our community concerned about the course of growth in NOTL.

Regarding the Parliament Oak hotel proposal, I'm not sure a quiet residential area with narrow streets and few sidewalks is the appropriate place to drop in a 129-room hotel.

However, I think it is vital to look at the foundation or building blocks of a community before running headlong into expansion and development.

If you are building homes that target the "retired" community, one must address the fact we don't have enough doctors to service our current population. We don't have a hospital nor a walk-in medical clinic and we only have one small medical lab with limited services.

If you are building homes that target the "family" community, we have limited availability of schools, plus the whole doctor and medical concerns.

We have a volunteer fire department. Where is the tipping point for these brave men and women who are answering ever-increasing calls? We have a limited police service – what is the tipping point for them?

I think we need to take a step back and look at a much bigger picture.

At what point does development, either in housing communities or tourist accommodation, actually end up changing the face of NOTL so that it is no longer the community that people flocked to?

People from larger metropolises are moving here because we are not those communities, but we are in danger of becoming mini versions of them.

At what point do we kill the goose that laid the golden egg? When are we no longer recognizable as the town that made people want to come here in the first place?

Is there the chance that down the road, development turns us into a Disneyland, a façade of what we actually have now? I love visiting Disneyland, but I wouldn't want to live there.

I don't have the answers, but I believe there is so much more to be discussed.

There are many historic and beautiful country communities that have achieved the fine balance and successfully integrated a historically designated and protected area while allowing development outside the designated area.

Another reality of Niagara-on-the-Lake is that, at

our core, we are an agricultural community. One of the main attractions of the area is the winery industry.

There are designated agricultural and greenbelt areas surrounding the town that cannot and, must not, be built upon. There are already safety issues along Lakeshore and rural roads due to increased vehicular traffic and speeding in complete disregard of the reality of slow-moving farm vehicles or cyclists.

Some people moving into housing at the edge of town don't realize they are moving into an agricultural area.

I was most amused at one gathering where some people who had recently purchased a home here for their weekend and holiday use were complaining that the farm vehicles actually worked, in the mornings on the weekend.

They were trying to rally neighbours to present a petition to council asking that farm vehicles not be allowed to be used before noon on weekends.

Some commercial and residential developers have been sensitive to the realities of our community and have created excellent examples of how development can move ahead positively.

It takes a developer with vision to work respectfully within the framework of a community. They need to want to protect what makes that community unique and not impose their own personal view of what NOTL should become.

**Syme Jago**  
NOTL



People once opposed the development of the Queen's Landing. EVAN LOREE

# People are right to speak up about planning issues

Dear editor:

I couldn't help but notice that peppered through the May 11 edition of The Lake Report were a number of references to existing buildings that had been opposed by residents at the time they were submitted to council for approval.

Specifically several references to Queen's Landing before it was built in 1990 ("up in arms") and a certain private house ("architectural blasphemy").

Apparently no one minds them now.

Is this meant to indicate that people just protest over nothing and then get over it? I wonder.

In fact, that is what usually happens.

A structure that is not sympathetic to the architectural vernacular of a town is proposed and a group of residents object to it.

Most of the submissions get approved anyway and then the existing residents learn to live with it.

Why? Because they have to get on with their lives and acceptance allows you to do that.

New people arrive and they also accept the new buildings because the buildings are already there.

The new buildings that do not support the original ambiance of the town set a precedent for others to follow at a later date and they do. And gradually the original character of the town is eroded – only old photographs remain.

The character of Niagara-on-the-Lake was established early on as early Canadian (your architecture columnist Brian Marshall probably has a better descriptor than that).

The fact that the character of the town still remains to some extent today is the result of the hard work of many committed residents over the years.

Despite the huge cultural significance of the area, few buildings are actually designated and there are no design guidelines to protect the original ambiance of the place.

As a result, insensitive buildings get approved and the fight continues.

The submissions that prompt the greatest protests

are the ones that demonstrate the least sympathy for the local vernacular.

This is not about density. This is about scale and design.

Protests are more likely to be successful in stopping certain developments or modifying designs to be more supportive of the surrounding neighbourhood only in areas of great affluence, such as Caledon or Toronto's Rosedale area.

They have been able to stop many unsuitable initiatives but not without a huge effort and considerable resources. And their fight, too, is never over.

People should speak out when they are not in agreement with a proposal and I don't blame them for moving on if they lose their fight.

But that doesn't mean they were wrong or that the people protesting now are wrong or that they shouldn't have bothered.

It just means that in the examples quoted, they didn't win.

**Jackie Bonic**  
NOTL