



TLR

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Happy 254th birthday, Brock



Jack Hill, 6, in costume as a Canadian soldier during a celebration of Maj-Gen. Sir Isaac Brock's 254th birthday at Queenston Heights on Friday. The afternoon was filled with historical lectures and tours. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

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**POSITIVE
POWER**

Contributed by Patty Garriock

"Change will not come if we wait for some other person or for some other time.

We are the ones we've been waiting for.

We are the change that we seek." - Barack Obama

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Editorial

An indoor swimming pool for NOTL

Kevin MacLean
Managing Editor

Who wants an indoor swimming pool in Niagara-on-the-Lake?

Perhaps the better question is: Who doesn't want an indoor swimming pool in Niagara-on-the-Lake?

The idea has been batted about in NOTL for many years, because, really, how could you not want the option of taking a regular dip in a modern, indoor facility, having your kids take swim lessons there or maybe trying some aquafit classes in the middle of January?

An ad hoc committee of residents has now grabbed the torch and through petitions, meetings and pitching the concept publicly has again tried to put an indoor pool on the civic agenda.

We have yet to hear anyone dismiss it as wholly unnecessary, though there has been a lot of pushback.

The main criticism seems to suggest that, while it's a nice idea, it is simply not an affordable option for a community the size of NOTL.

Yet, some similar-sized towns (and some smaller ones) have managed to make it happen.

We agree that affordability is a huge concern – NOTLers already pay a lot in property taxes and with

a tax base of only 19,000 residents (and fewer than 10,000 households). There is little room for expanding spending on a major capital project the magnitude of an indoor pool.

We're just too small.

Not too small for a spanking new pool, just too small to be able to afford one by dumping the full cost on the taxpayer.

However, that is not to suggest the proponents of a pool should give up or fold their proverbial tent.

Saying no is simple. Dismissing the idea as pie-in-the-sky is the easy route.

Finding ways to make things happen or to seek out alternatives requires a lot more effort and dedication.

Indoor pools are big-ticket items and cost figures like \$15 million to \$20 million (or more) are common for a facility with a 25-metre pool and related facilities.

Plus annual operating costs could easily be many hundreds of thousands of dollars. So, no matter how you look at it, an indoor pool in a municipality is pricey – even with grants from other levels of government to help with the initial build.

(Of course, there's also the matter of serious repairs needed to the aging outdoor pool in St. Davids, but that is a separate issue.)

Some have suggested that with the planned growth coming to NOTL's Glendale community – up to 15,000 people (or more) eventually – that would be a logical location for an indoor swimming facility, perhaps in conjunction with a high school proposed for that area.

An interesting idea, but years off.

So, what can be done in the meantime? We'd like to see the committee of indoor pool advocates continue their push for a solution – because maybe they'll find one. Nothing ventured ...

NOTL certainly has a lot of very smart residents with experience in a wide variety of fields. Let's tap into that expertise, crowdsource it.

Or perhaps a major developer – maybe a group of developers – in town could find a way to help kickstart such a project, or fund it all. You never know what might be possible. Toronto has mandated such contributions under section 37 of the Planning Act for years. Could NOTL do something similar?

Or maybe the more common route – community fundraising – is the way to go, launching a campaign to try to raise enough to make it a reality.

And then there's some outside-the-box thinking, as some have already noted and columnist Ross Robinson mentioned last week in passing: could Old Town's existing pool at Veterans Memorial Park be temporarily enclosed under a dome from, say, September to May?

Wild and unworkable? Maybe. Let's find out.

Because we know outdoor soccer pitches, tennis courts and golf ranges can be put under a bubble. So what about swimming pools?

Or is this an opportunity for a unique public-private partnership that would enable NOTL to make an indoor pool a reality? Nothing ventured ...

One final note: like many small towns, NOTL has a long tradition of the community coalescing over a common cause.

Our special little town has attracted more than its share of extremely successful individuals, with deep pockets, who might be inclined to give generously to a grassroots campaign to build an indoor pool in town.

That might not help with operational costs, but given the right approach maybe there is a way around that stumbling block, too.

Because, nothing ventured, nothing gained.

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