



A Message From
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Dear Frances,

I'm going to begin this email by stating the obvious: all municipal plans and strategies have a long-term and often permanent impact on their communities. After all, that's what they're meant to do. In his book [Welcome to the Hall](#),

James Ridge, known as one of Canada's most experienced municipal leaders, states that,

In a country where more than 85 percent of the population live in cities and towns, local government land use planning shapes the social, economic, cultural, and environmental fabric of the country in significant ways. It has an impact that often lasts decades or centuries.

This comment on land use planning also applies to many other municipal responsibilities, and it reassures me that, as your Councillor, I can serve NOTL well by seriously considering the consequences of decisions made today on the town's long-term prosperity and well-being.

This Fall, Council deliberations will have a strong focus on the long term. The Council approved the [Town's Strategic Plan](#) in July, and this provides the springboard for every Town action between now and 2027. Strategies due to come before Council in the next few months include transportation (deferred from 2022), parks and recreation, and tourism, and they must all fit within the overall framework of the Plan approved in July. In addition, an update to the Town's Official Plan will also be looked at by Council.

As the peak visitor season begins to wind down, it seems appropriate to look more closely at how we can plan successfully for tourism, one of our most important economic sectors. However, we're all aware of the increasing strains that the influx of people and vehicles each year places on the whole of NOTL, and plans for the future of tourism affect us all. In August, the Tourism Strategy Committee received the background report on tourism in NOTL, and the presentation is well worth viewing on the [Town's website](#). It includes surveys of residents and visitors as well as other valuable data about the town and its tourism industry.

The report made me think about the many areas of agreement in the community about what a long-term plan for sustainable tourism should contain:

- A focus on best experience for all interests – residents, business, visitors, rural economy

- Commitment to implementing best practices for increasing NOTL's resilience to environmental degradation and the rapidly-developing effects of climate change
- Preservation of NOTL's attractiveness as an escape from urban life in large centres
- An easing of pressures on the Old Town heritage district
- A solution to vehicle and foot traffic throughout the municipality that respects all users, especially at specific pressure points and high-risk areas
- Development and management of visitor accommodations and attractions in keeping with the neighbourhood, whether it's a rural area, village, Glendale, or Old Town.
- Partnering and liaising with other relevant interests (such as Canada Parks, Niagara Region Transit) to create a seamless transition between regional attractions, and deliver the best experience for all
- Continuing to engage in discussions about tourism workforce issues – aging local population, commuting levels, lack of appropriate housing
- Ongoing consultation across the board during the plan's implementation

Of course, the devil's in the details, and even when a majority agrees on the goals, there will be many interpretations of what needs to be done to achieve them. Here's a list of criteria I think may help identify actions that favour a successful future for tourism in Niagara-on-the-Lake:

- Seek to achieve business and industry objectives within the context of lasting benefits to the whole community, and its physical and natural assets
- Learn from strategies adopted by other similar tourist destinations
- Extend the value of tourism within existing capacity and make the most of up-coming opportunities (For example, what does the plan for a car pool at Glendale offer in terms of a park-and-ride shuttle to NOTL destinations?)
- Recognize opportunities presented by the plan to implement actions that contribute to the mitigation of climate and environmental degradation
- Minimize encroachment (including zoning changes) on agricultural, environmentally important, and other significant natural and community features
- Strongly resist adjusting the strong municipal standards and practices that protect our community's long-term resilience and prosperity
- Test long-term concepts with temporary trials, as was done with restaurant patios
- Double-down on forums for residents' input that reinforce confidence that the Town gives full weight to residents' hopes and concerns

Returning to James Ridge's comment at the top of this email, the Tourism Strategy is just one of the plans that will come before Council over the next few months. Each plan will certainly contribute to shaping "*the social, economic, cultural, and environmental fabric*" of Niagara-on-the-Lake during the next decade and possibly beyond.

While it's a daunting responsibility, I look forward to bringing my best contribution to Council deliberations, and to represent the interest of the community as a whole to achieve plans we can be proud of.

Thank you for your attention,

Sandra O'Connor
NOTL Town Councillor