

A Message from Councillor Sandra O'Connor

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A Message From
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RAIN, DRAINS AND STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

Do you remember the downpour on Tuesday, June 18?

On that day, during a single hour, The Village experienced a “once in a century” rainfall of 2.5 inches during one hour. In St. David’s, at the Warner Road rain gauge, 3.5 inches fell within an hour, and this quantity, by pre-climate-change standards, is expected only once in four or five hundred years. More recently, on July 10, I wondered how many NOTL residents and businesses watched anxiously as the remnants of Hurricane Beryl approached.

Friday, January 26 is also memorable. On that day, melting snow combined with heavy rainfall to cause flooding on rural roads, and Two and Four Mile Creeks overflowed their banks.

Whenever rainfall and/or melting snow is more than the drains and waterways can cope with, surface water and run-off causes driving hazards, sends valuable soil into the drainage system and erodes the road or field surface, significantly increasing the costs of road maintenance. I don’t need to explain the impact floodwater has if it enters homes or business locations.

By 2051
 “The frequency of extreme precipitation days
 (i.e. daily precipitation greater than 25 mm)
 is projected to increase by
 21 per cent.”
Niagara Region Climate Change Projections (p6) 2023



Flooding and surface damage from rainfall on July 10, 2024

In 2020, the [Association of Municipalities Ontario](#) summed up the problem: “nature is throwing more water at municipalities Association of Municipalities than can be managed”, and in recent years all levels of government in Ontario, and relevant non-government agencies, have been working the problem. It’s a complex process, and a framework for municipalities to use in assessing and preparing for increased precipitation still needs to be done.

Here in Niagara-on-the-Lake, since the new term began in November 2022, Council has failed to prioritize climate change adaptation, despite having a [fully-formed plan](#) in place and ready to go. After almost two years’ delay, members of the Environmental Advisory Committee have at last been selected and will meet for the first time on July 17. The appointment of a Climate Co-Ordinator, to support staff’s efforts implementing essential change such as flood risk management, hasn’t been recruited yet. Without both these components in place, our promise to integrate “an environmental stewardship lens into all aspects of our [Strategic Plan](#)” can’t be met.

Dealing with stormwater is just one of the many necessary climate change adaptations that’s being neglected. Nevertheless, I regard stormwater as important enough for me to take steps to focus more attention on new flood risk standards, and the development of a master plan for stormwater servicing.

Earlier this year, I put forward a Council motion asking staff to consult with relevant agencies on increasing the one-in-a-hundred-year model, and to report back in the Fall. You can [read the motion here](#). I'm pleased to say the motion was passed and I hope it will help us get much closer to new and better flood risk management throughout NOTL.

Meanwhile, and unavoidably, the Town has to replace aging stormwater drains, and drainage has to be built for new sub-divisions and other developments. Just this year, I've raised concerns about flood risks and stormwater management for three important planning proposals considered by Council:

- Tawny Ridge Phases 1 & 2 (St.David's) ([Committee of the Whole – General 01/16/2024](#). My comments at 1:14:27)
- White Oaks (235-252 Taylor Road, Glendale) (*Sandra, see footnote) ([Committee of the Whole – Planning 06/11/2024](#). My comments at 00:29:07)
- The Reservoir (Niagara Stone Rd/Walker Rd., Virgil). ([Council April 2024 Item 17.1](#) My comments at 2:58:16)

At Tawny Ridge, the plan is based on criteria that are known to be inadequate, and include allowing water from very heavy rainfall to run along road surfaces to the nearest stormwater pond as part of the approved stormwater management network.

At White Oaks and The Reservoir, the plans put the cart before the horse: the developers seem to take it for granted that the results of scientific studies yet to be completed will conform to their needs. They also assume that there will be no barriers to placing drains on lands they don't own.

You may know that all of these planning proposals were accepted by Council. In each case, I was unsatisfied that the proposals demonstrated reasonable certainty that the management of the stormwater could cope with the coming 21% increase in extreme precipitation. For these and other reasons, I voted "no" to each proposal.

This Council term is dealing with major planning proposals that will permanently change the face of our built environment. During these important discussions, my persistent attention to stormwater drainage may seem like micro-managing but, on July 10, just a month after the last major downpour, [Environment Canada](#) predicted for Niagara " *Rainfall totals of 40 to 60 mm, with locally higher amounts possible [and] Torrential downpours giving rainfall rates of 20 to 40 mm per hour at times. That is to say, another "extreme precipitation day."* After the downpour, [Niagara Now](#) summarized the event.

The power of water to damage homes, landscape and businesses isn't trivial. It's costly. It disrupts and damages lives.

Be assured, until I'm satisfied that stormwater infrastructure will be designed and built to standards that we can have confidence in, I will continue to be vocal, and urge

Council to treat flood risk assessment as an urgent priority.

Thank you for your attention,

Sandra O'Connor
Town Councillor, NOTL.

RESPECT THE PAST - PLAN FOR THE FUTURE - ATTEND TO THE PRESENT

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