



A Message From
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Dear Frances,

In this edition of my newsletter, as 2024 draws to a close, I've chosen to reflect on some of the successes of the past year, and also to review some important areas in which challenges have arisen, and perhaps setbacks experienced.

SUCCESS IN 2024

Heritage Status Designation. Back in January 2023, I drew Council's attention to the provincial government's intention to put a deadline of November 2024 on achieving provincial heritage status for many properties needing protection. (For more background see my email of [July 2023](#)). At the time, 116 out of 200 properties on our Municipal Heritage Register had not received provincial status. At that meeting, I put forward a motion asking the Town to look at how we could possibly meet the 2024 deadline. Although the motion was defeated, my concerns were noted, and in May 2023 the Planning Department brought to council a [heritage designation workplan](#). Subsequently, the 2024 budget included funding for a new heritage planner and this year the Town has been able to add 12 properties to the Ontario Heritage Trust's list of designated properties, which will protect them from demolition or unsympathetic alteration so that their heritage attributes can be conserved. Six more applications are currently being prepared. It's a very good start, especially now that, in response to widespread municipal dismay at the short deadline, the province has extended the [deadline](#) for achieving provincial heritage status to January 1, 2027.

Ontario Land Tribunal. While on the topic of heritage, a great sigh of relief was heard throughout Niagara-on-the-Lake when the results of Solmar Development's appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT) were announced on October 11. The [Tribunal ruled](#) that Solmar should revise its development proposal for the rear half of Randwood Estate, which the NOTL Town Council had rejected because of its destruction of much of the estate's heritage attributes. The OLT did give Solmar the opportunity to pursue a redesign in consultation with the Town, but instead – in true Solmar fashion – it has lodged an [appeal](#) with the OLT and the Superior Court of Ontario for the decision to be reviewed. Let's hope the OLT and Court stand by the October decision.

Nurse Practitioner. This year, Niagara-on-the-Lake has benefitted from the appointment of two new doctors in late 2023 and, in April 2024, the nurse-practitioner who serves residents without a family practitioner and visitors to the town was reinstated. Since early 2022, I'd been lobbying strongly for reinstating the nurse, and was delighted when the provincial funding was at last released in April. Although the level of primary health care in

NOTL at a time of rapid population growth is still a concern, 2024 saw real progress in providing essential care in our communities. [Read more](#) in my November 2023 and April 2024 newsletters.

Infrastructure. During this Council term, it has been a concern that, over several years, the Town has been seriously falling behind on capital investment in the town's infrastructure, such as major road reconstruction and storm-water management. A ten-year plan, presented at the October 10 budget meeting ([Item 4.5](#)) has now been presented to correct this trend and, during the various budget meetings, staff presented its full proposals for investment in 2025.

It's very good news that Council is tackling long-term needs and addressing past shortfalls but, of course, it comes at a cost, and the next three years will bear the brunt. During committee discussions, I raised several proposals whereby the 2025 impact might be mitigated, but was over-ruled by my colleagues ([Budget Review Committee, October 30 Hr: 55:33](#)). Nevertheless, I'm fully supportive of Council's commitment to re-align long-term investment in infrastructure, which is (almost literally!) the essential foundation for our communities' well-being, civic pride, and success.

CONTINUING CHALLENGES

Planning/Zoning. If one issue has dominated this year's relationship between council and community, it has to be planning permission and zoning amendments. In January, I drew Council's attention to the exceptional number of planning applications in process which foretold an increase of almost 4,000 new residents and 481 new hotel rooms (40%) in NOTL. I pointed out that the decisions Council make on these applications are going to permanently impact the character of the town, and I suggested some criteria to help us get to the right decisions, including: protect our heritage; ensure we have appropriate infrastructure in place for 20% growth; and make evidence-based decisions([see my February newsletter](#)).

Throughout the sometimes heated discussions about new developments and zoning changes, I've kept my list by my side. As you know, several decisions have been controversial on all three of the criteria I mention above, and I voted against applications and/or zoning amendments that didn't, in my view, meet them. Some applications didn't provide convincing evidence that sufficient drainage and/or waste-water infrastructure was in place, or could definitely be achieved, to cope with the expected impact of new developments ([see my July newsletter](#)). Other applications asked for zoning changes that would permanently change the character of our town or landscape. Others applications challenged well-considered policies such building height limits in specific areas. Old Town has seen several height restrictions set aside (unnecessarily in my opinion) and I'm particularly concerned that changing the bylaw for the height of buildings in Glendale will mar unspoiled views in one area of the Escarpment that is still free of such visual obstructions.

Notably, the decision to grant planning permission for the large hotel on King Street attracted strong, ongoing opposition. The objections included: the negative impact on our Old Town landscape; unmanageable traffic increase on an important access route to the heritage area; negative repercussions on the neighbourhood, its residents and character; unproven plans for parking and traffic management; and questionable evidence that another large hotel and event venue was actually needed or appropriate in the centre of Old Town. Despite major opposition from residents in and beyond the immediate neighbourhood, the Council vote approved the plan.**Climate Change.** Remember how,

back in 2022, the Town published its [Climate Change Adaptation Plan](#) (CCAP)? You'd be forgiven for having forgotten all about it, because two years' later, there's very little to report. Having deferred the essential appointment of a Climate Change Coordinator for the Town from 2023 to 2024, the position still hasn't been filled. Although the recruitment process is now underway, for the two years we've been without the coordinator there's been virtually no movement on introducing practices and projects to reduce and adapt our town's vulnerability to the rapidly-changing environment.

The CCAP is just one of several community-oriented programs in the Town's 2022-2027 Strategic Plan that are behind schedule, or haven't even been started. At the [Budget Review Committee](#) (November 20, 2024. Hr: 00:30:50) I pointed this out, and I hope the end-of-year report on the Strategic Plan's progress will show better results.

Water Management. In the light of the two major storms we experienced this summer, at the same Budget Review Committee meeting I asked about progress on water management projects, a matter of urgent concern in the community. I was informed that a water needs study was completed in 2024, and the program for ongoing maintenance of storm-water ponds is well underway. This maintenance will continue into 2025 and beyond.

On the other hand, the Dock Area Shoreline Protection and Chautauqua Storm studies slated for 2024 have been rolled into the 2025 Operating Budget under the Dock Area Master Plan Update and the Subwatershed Plan, respectively ([November 20, 2024](#) Hr: 1:17). Staff commented at the [Budget Review Committee](#) (October 10, 2024. Hr: 2:20:00) that other areas, such as Chautauqua, Queenston and St. David's are also being looked at for stormwater studies, and I hope these will receive the level of priority that residents themselves would place on them.

Also, important studies on Four Mile Creek and Six Mile Creek watersheds, to be carried out with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA), are still outstanding. Although staff are confident the Four Mile Creek study will be done in 2025, there's concern that the NPCA may not be able to work on both studies during one year ([November 20, 2024](#) Hr: 00:36). 2025 will therefore see progress for the those living in the Four Mile Creek watershed, but timeliness in completing Six Mile Creek study is critical to the infrastructure development in Glendale, where plans are already underway for high-density residential construction.

In summary: Every year in Council is a mix of gains and setbacks and in this newsletter I've highlighted just a few that I think may be top-of-mind for residents. Over the holiday period I'm going to celebrate the successes of 2024 and then, in 2025, I commit to persevering in my pursuit of strong gains for our communities, and in understanding the challenges that will no doubt arise. I hope you'll contact me if you have any questions or concerns relating to Council business in the coming months, but for now I wish you and your loved ones all the joys of the season, and a happy and prosperous New Year.

Sincerely,
Sandra O'Connor
Town Councillor