



A Message From
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Greetings!,

PRIMARY HEALTH UPDATE

I expect you know that two new family doctors have been recruited to work out of the Virgil Clinic. This is great news and, if you ~~live in Virgil and~~* aren't registered with a doctor, you can now at least join the [wait list](#) for registration.

This isn't perfect, but it's definitely progress: there are still about 6,000 people in Niagara without a family doctor. According to Niagara Region, [Niagara-on-the-Lake should have at least one more doctor](#), although given the town's demographics we need more than one. Nevertheless, thanks are due to those in the Region and NOTL who advocated successfully to have these two positions filled.

In my [May email](#), I talked about the efforts being made to reinstate the second nurse practitioner for NOTL, a position which was transferred elsewhere during the pandemic. Work continues locally [to press the province](#) to reinstate the position. In my position as Councillor, I've continued to advocate for it at every opportunity. Recently, Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa and Member of Provincial Parliament Wayne Gates joined forces to send a joint letter to Ontario's Health Minister, Sylvia Jones, [calling for the province to reinstate the nurse practitioner](#). MPP Gates subsequently [raised the issue](#) in Parliament's question time, repeatedly asking the Minister about the position, but her answers were evasive and avoided the question. However, in the meantime, the Ministry has confirmed that, later in the Fall, it's due to announce whether or not it will fund the position.

As a "sidebar" on this issue, the Ontario Financial Accountability Office estimated (June 2023) that the Province's spending plan shows there will be \$22.6 billion in "excess funds" over the next few years, and that within this amount ["the health sector represents about \\$4.4 billion in excess funds."](#) I sincerely hope that with the town's rapid population growth and above-average number of seniors, the province recognizes the urgency of NOTL's needs and releases some of its excess funding for NOTL's nurse practitioner and a third family physician.

MAT TAX

The [Municipal Accommodation Tax](#) (MAT) Committee held its first meeting in September, and I'm honoured to have been elected to the position of Chair.

The Tax was adopted by Council in August 2022. It derives from legislation enacted by the Province of Ontario in 2017 [allowing](#) municipalities to implement a tax on payments for

overnight accommodation.

Initially, to give accommodation providers in NOTL time to adjust, the tax was applied only to locations with five or more rooms, at a rate of 2% per room per night. During its first year of operation (July 2022 – June 2023) \$737,609 was collected.

The second stage of the tax implementation takes place in January 2024, when MAT will increase to 3%, and all overnight accommodation providers will become subject to the tax. In January 2025, it will increase to 4%.

In keeping with the MAT legislation, 50% of the revenue must be passed to the local Destination Marketing Organization, an entity operated under Tourism NOTL. The Town and the DMO will therefore each receive \$368,804 to allocate within the terms of MAT. The Town's portion is placed in a reserve for future initiatives, as determined by Council.

In 2022, Council identified two initiatives for funding: [NOTL Museum](#)'s capital renovations project will receive \$500,000, and MAT revenue will be applied to Queen Street enhancements to the Commercial District Landscape Treatment and Service Levels.

The Destination Marketing Organization's mandate and initiatives should focus on the promotion of tourism.

Now that the MAT Committee has been struck, our immediate priority is to develop a framework ensuring expenditure of the tax revenue is appropriate, consistent, transparent, and in keeping with the legislation's requirements.

Members of the MAT Committee bring an excellent range of skills to the job. The members represent both residents and the tourism sector. All have long experience in their fields and are closely involved in the community. As chair, I'm grateful to have such expertise among the members. I believe that, if we continue to listen to residents and tourism stakeholders, the Committee will be well-placed to achieve its purpose, make recommendations to Council, and ensure accountable and responsible investment of the tax proceeds that support sustainable tourism within a thriving community.

Thank you for your attention,

Sandra O'Connor
NOTL Councillor

*This phrase has been deleted following distribution to correct this sentence.

Respect The Past - Plan For The Future - Attend To The Present

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