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Greetings!,

Although the new year is well underway, I'd still like to take a moment to wish you the best for 2024. For me, as your Councillor, the year will bring many issues to work on and I hope I will serve you and the community well throughout.

This week will be no exception. At Tuesday's Council meeting I'll be presenting motions to: revise the flood criteria in order to reduce flooding risk; protect trees during construction; establish more time to review developments; and ensure Council receives the Rand Estate and John St. East character study before the Ontario Land Tribunal meeting takes place. You can watch live, or view the recording at your leisure on [the Town's website](#).

Last month I was very pleased to have the opportunity to attend the Rural Ontario Municipalities Association (ROMA) Conference, along with Lord Mayor Zalepa, Deputy Lord Mayor Wiens, and Councillor Cheropita. Our interim Chief Administrative Officer Bruce Zvaniga, and Strategy and Government Relations Officer Victoria Steel also attended.

During the three days of conference, we made the most of the rare opportunity meet with individual provincial ministers and senior departmental personnel. The [Town's media release](#) gives summaries of the issues we raised at these meetings, such as: the urgency of recruiting a physician and a nurse practitioner for the Town; the protection of our heritage buildings; the adjustment of taxation on VQA wines; agricultural irrigation systems; and planning application procedures.

Talking of planning applications, the Town's receiving an exceptional number of applications for residential developments, and they're increasingly complex and controversial. In Niagara-on-the-Lake, over many years, we've seen that such developments have a wide variety of effects, on both the day-to-day life of the neighbourhood and the long-term character of the municipality.

I was curious about just how much impact the proposals currently on the way through the planning process would have in terms of population and infrastructure, and so I did an

analysis of planning applications which were available on the Town's website on January 1, 2024. You can take a look at the list I compiled [here](#). I discovered that NOTL had the second highest number of development applications within the entire Niagara Region. If they were all approved, this would be their impact on the Town:

**Population would increase by approximately 4,000 (20%),** based on two occupants per residential unit. This is 39% of all of NOTL's growth for the entire 2021-2051 period, as projected in the [Niagara Official Plan 2022](#) (p 16).

Figure 1: Population growth based on 2024 development applications

Year	NOTL population	Change	% change
2016	17,511		
2021	19,088	1,577	9%
2021+ Jan 2024 planning applications	22,950	3,896	20%

Figure 2: 2024 development application population impact as % of 2051 population target

Year	NOTL population	Change	% change
2021	19,088		
2051 projection	28,900	9,812	51%
2024 applications as a proportion of 2021-2051 planned growth			39%

Sources: [Town of NOTL](#), [Province of Ontario](#), [Niagara Official Plan](#)

**Hotel capacity would increase by 481 rooms.** In 2022 there were 1,189 units in hotels with five rooms or more. 481 additional rooms are an increase of 40%.

If these developments are all approved, their impact on the town will likely be staggered over time, because it's the developer who decides when to begin construction. Nevertheless, over a relatively short timeframe this level of development will change the face of neighbourhoods and communities in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and the municipality as a whole.

I presented my findings to Council at the [January 9 Committee of the Whole \(Planning\)](#) [Hour1:30]. I talked about our responsibility for getting the upcoming decisions "right", and suggested criteria that will help us, such as:

- **Protect our heritage**, both natural and built, not only for its inherent value, but to protect our economy
- **Follow our Official Plan**
- **Intensify in the areas designated in our Official Plan for intensification**
- **Employ climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies** to minimize the results of change and to adapt to extreme weather
- **Ensure we have appropriate infrastructure in place** for 20% growth

- **Make evidence-based decisions** by taking into account all available information.

There can be no doubt that development proposals will continue to feature largely in the life of Niagara-on-the-Lake in the coming year. Each proposal will bring its own advantages and challenges, together with achievements and disappointments for each stakeholder. As Council deliberates the options, I'll be keeping my criteria on hand to guide me as we consider how a sustainable and successful future can be built for everyone in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Thank you for your attention,

Sandra O'Connor  
Town Councillor,  
Niagara-on-the-Lake

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