

NOTL DRAFT MUNICIPAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

Development has and will continue to be a challenge in Niagara-on-the-Lake given the unique heritage character of Old Town and the mix of multiple urban areas and agricultural land. During the current Council's mandate, Council consulted on and approved a new Official Plan. That plan is awaiting approval from the Region, which is expected shortly after the new Regional OP is approved by the Province. There is enormous development pressure on Old Town NOTL in particular given its world-renowned character and charm. The Rand Estate occupies a central and important place in Old Town as one of the last estate residential properties and is an essential part of the Town's cultural heritage history.

Dear Directors and Members of SORE:

Thank you for sending me your Election 2022 Survey. I appreciate the passion and dedication that SORE demonstrates in its advocacy for our beloved Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL). Civic engagement and participation have always been a cornerstone of our community and is an important contributor to our vibrant community spirit. Relatedly, heritage and cultural preservation efforts have long been a critical part of protecting what makes NOTL so special. I wholeheartedly support efforts to preserve our heritage assets and have a track record of doing so while in public office as Town Councillor (2003-2014). I have been fortunate to live in Niagara-on-the-Lake my entire life. I chose to stay here to raise my family because I believe it is a truly fantastic place to live. The Town's rich heritage and its abundant protected green spaces are two of the foremost reasons why I love living here so much. As a devoted community leader and volunteer who believes in giving back to the community through public service, I intend to use my platform as Regional Councillor to advocate for the preservation of our Town's most cherished assets, so they can be enjoyed for generations to come.

One of the primary ways in which we can achieve this mission is to conform to sensible planning practices, thereby ensuring any development respects the character and integrity of our local streetscapes and landscapes. This includes protecting our sacred local greenspaces. When I served as Chair of the Town Council Standing Committee on Planning, I used these principles to inform my balanced approach to decision making on any development proposals. As a Member of the Municipal Heritage Committee, I also worked with the Town to advance these goals. As Regional Councillor, I will work alongside community members to do the same.

I believe my record of service to our community over the last twenty years demonstrates my commitment to heritage preservation and appropriate planning and development. However, I have decided not to answer the questions in the second part of your questionnaire (questions one through four are answered below) because I feel it would be inappropriate for me to do so as a political candidate. These questions relate to a specific development proposal that is the subject of ongoing litigation.

As a matter of principle and out of concern for the integrity of judicial and administrative processes, I do not feel political candidates should weigh in on on-going legal matters. However, I do feel it is important for the Town to defend itself and taxpayers against any frivolous litigation. Moreover, I believe the Rand Estate is important heritage asset, whose history must be respected and nurtured. Any development proposals or activities that show inadequate regard for this history and violates the character of our broader community are deeply problematic. The principles of the Ontario Heritage Act must be respected and if they are not, the Act provides for appropriate remedies.

Beyond my concern for the integrity of the judicial process, I also do not comment on specific development proposals as a political candidate that may appear before me if eventually elected. This practice comes out of a concern for upholding the principles of procedural fairness. I believe decisions must only be taken after applicants and other relevant parties have had a chance to present their case to me. I am very happy to answer questions about my guiding principles, values, and policy preferences during election, but this is quite different than commenting on specific applications. In this vein, I would also choose not to comment in favour or in opposition to a specific grant application submitted to the Town during a political campaign if I was asked.

While it is unlikely that this matter would come to Regional Council because it falls under the jurisdiction of the Town Council, it may relate to planning (i.e., Official Plan) issues discussed at the Region. Moreover, it is seldom helpful for a politician at one level of government to weigh-in on specific applications being considered by another level. I hope and trust that you understand my approach to this questionnaire. As mentioned, community groups play an important role in our local democratic process. However, elected officials play a distinct role – it is the job of elected politicians to consider evidence from a range of stakeholders and residents and then use this to make informed decision-making.

One of the toughest but most crucial jobs of public office holders is to reconcile diverse perspectives and opinions to find common ground where possible. This balanced approach has always informed my deliberations as an elected official and will continue to do so if elected. The principles and values I have outlined in this letter – including on heritage and cultural protection – are deeply held for me. If elected as Regional Councillor for NOTL, residents can and should hold me accountable for upholding them in my decision-making on behalf of the community.

Together, we can ensure that NOTL thrives for generations to come.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea Kaiser
Candidate for Regional Councillor (NOTL)

1. Do you agree with the statement that intensive residential development should be directed to Glendale and those areas of Old Town, Virgil, St Davids and Queenston that do not compete with or require compromising the Town's cultural heritage assets?

Yes, I believe that intensive residential development should respect our community's heritage assets and conform to the Official Plan.

2. Do you agree that large-scale residential developments should be required to thoroughly assess the planning merits including compliance with the new NOTL OP, heritage, servicing, traffic and environmental matters (including watercourses) before any development application is made?

Yes, I believe holistic consideration of the planning merits – including the factors you've outlined - of every large-scale residential development proposal must be part of the application process.

3. Do you support character studies to identify, the cultural heritage attributes of sites and their surroundings before development applications are made in Old Town?

I am very supportive of the planning process whereby planning applications that include heritage properties or landscapes are required to have their applications, as a part of the planning process, to the Municipal Heritage Committee for review and comment before being directed to Council table. I served on this committee for two terms (8 years) and found it to be a very effective mechanism and tool embedded into the planning process in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

4. Are you in favour of spending money to defend planning integrity in our community? Do you agree that funds spent to assess and oppose questionable/unsuitable development applications in Niagara-on-the-Lake is money well spent?

The Ontario Heritage Act and Official Plan set out policy frameworks that must be respected. If they are violated, there are several enforcement tools that can be used by the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and its partners. I believe it is important that these enforcement tools be deployed to oppose problematic proposals because if they are not, the policy frameworks lose their integrity and legitimacy. It is important to acknowledge that some of these enforcement measures require financial expenditures. However, we must take a balanced approach and work toward mutually agreeable solutions when possible to ensure that any expenditures related to enforcement are sensible and proportionate to the threat presented by the problematic development.