

Nick Ruller responses to SORE 2022

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.

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

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

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?

Yes

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? If not, what approach would you take to uphold our Official Plan and the Ontario *Heritage Act* when faced with aggressive and litigious developers and problematic development proposals?

Yes

With respect to the Solmar/Marotta group proposals for the Rand Estate:

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being most important, how critical do you think getting the Rand Estate right is for the future of Old Town NOTL.

10 - Getting these types of developments right is incredibly important. Once the development is complete, the Town is left to deal with the long-term concerns, challenges, and frustrations of residents. This is often in the form of noise complaints, parking issues, and other practices that may interfere with the enjoyment of their properties. Inevitably, any completed development is then used as an example for future developments of what is possible and comparable, setting the stage for similar proposals.

2. Do you support completion of the special character area study for the Rand Estate required by the new NOTL Official Plan before any decisions are made concerning appropriate land use at Randwood?

Yes

3. Do you think the front and back half of the Rand Estate need to be comprehensively assessed before any redevelopment applications are approved rather than piecemealing the Estate into individual parcels?

Yes. The combination of multiple applications present unique challenges and potential.

Consideration should be given to their combined impact.

4. The Marotta group has proposed plans for the back half of the Rand Estate which vary between 170 and 190 residential units, and which would remove substantially all of the remaining cultural heritage attributes of 200 John and 588 Charlotte. Are you familiar with the Marotta plans?

Yes

5. SORE has published a conceptual plan for the back half of the Rand Estate showing how it could be repurposed for residential use in a manner sensitive to both the Estate and the surrounding residential neighbourhood while conserving the cultural heritage attributes of Randwood. The SORE plan contemplates a mix of approximately 70 residential units and includes public access to this very important cultural heritage asset. Are you familiar with the SORE plan?

Yes

6. If you are not familiar with either the SORE or Marotta plans, can we send them to you so that you can respond to question 6 below?

7. Do you believe the SORE or the Marotta plan is preferred for the back half of the Rand Estate? Please elaborate.

While both plans are still problematic as the coordination with the front half has not been completed, I believe SORE's plan is more sensitive and respectful to the uniqueness of the Rand Estate.

8. The Town is currently prosecuting the Marotta companies under the Ontario *Heritage Act* for the November, 2018 clear cutting of a vast portion of the Rand Estate. If the prosecution is successful the Town is entitled to reinstate any illegally destroyed heritage landscape at the owner's expense. Do you support such reinstatement?

I am unable to weigh in on this as I am not familiar with what the reinstatement process may look like.

9. Do you think Solmar/the Marotta group should be required to critically assess all access alternatives to access the Rand Estate, including adjacent land owned by the Two Sisters winery?

Yes

10. The Marotta/Solmar proposal for a hotel/convention centre on the front half of the Rand Estate required a large traffic circle at the intersection of John St E and the Parkway, using lands owned by/under the control of the Niagara Parks Commission and likely impacting mature trees in that area. SORE's traffic experts believe the traffic circle will similarly be required for the proposed Rand subdivision. Do you support the installation of a traffic circle at that location?

As the impact of the potential traffic circle is no known at this point, I feel it is premature to weigh in on the suitability. If there are widespread traffic impacts that relate to either proposal, consideration should be given to these impacts as part of the overall comprehensive consideration of the proposals.