

Community Planning Permit (CPP) System

Committee Meeting Summary | March 2026

New Members

Tony Varga

Retired CEO/GM with an engineering background, recently relocated from Cambridge with his wife Eva (M&A attorney). Spent 10 years with Kellogg's automating cereal plants, worked in China, then held senior leadership roles at a Fortune 100 company and two private European firms for the last 20 years.

Stephen Gregg

Retired engineer (B.Eng, University of Western Ontario — Engineering Science & Materials Science). Career spanning Ontario and Alberta in oil & gas and energy, including roles at Union Carbide and Siemens Energy (Oakville). A direct neighbour to the Parliament Oak development and motivated to join due to local planning concerns.

Main Focus: Community Planning Permit (CPP) System

Three committee members presented visual and research work on the CPP concept:

Brian — CPP Components & Structure

Outlined core elements a CPP system can include:

- Allowable land uses and development standards
- Formalized parameters for staff discretion (what staff can decide without full process review)
- Parkland provisions under Section 42, including micro-forests
- Mixed-use and affordable housing requirements
- Urban design standards — particularly important for preserving NOTL's tourism character
- Drop-dead dates on development permits (typically 12 months) to prevent land banking

David — Regional Consistency & AI-Assisted Research

Emphasized the importance of consistent planning rules across all NOTL communities (Old Town, Virgil, St. David's, Queenston, etc.). Noted that entrenched CPP rules would prevent future councils from arbitrarily changing planning standards — a key weakness of the current system. Used Claude (AI) to research how CPP has been applied elsewhere.

Gordon — Visual Communications

Focused on how the CPP process is presented — not just the content, but how clearly it communicates. Identified issues with existing diagrams (misaligned colour coding, mixed text direction) and proposed a cleaner layout with horizontal flow and layered/interactive graphics. Noted that council responds well to brief, visual presentations.

Key Discussion Points

Affordable Housing

The provincial minimum was noted to have dropped to 5% under the Ford government, and mandating affordable housing without financial support is difficult. However, federal programs through **Canada Build** and **CMHC's L1 Grant program** can offset development charges, permit fees, and other costs for developers who meet criteria including minimum affordable unit counts and energy efficiency standards. A committee member offered to circulate project examples.

Micro-Forests

Proposed as a powerful tool to address NOTL's critically low tree canopy (~18% vs. the 30% provincial target). Key characteristics:

- Minimum size: approximately 60 x 20 feet
- All native species, densely planted
- Self-sustaining after ~3 years of care
- Within 10 years, produces 30–40 ft trees with full understory
- Benefits: air filtration, water absorption, bird/mammal habitat
- Could be required for developments of 25+ units

Drop-Dead Dates on Permits

Typically 12 months; prevents land banking where developers obtain permits and sell the entitled land without building. The group noted a local example where an approved 17-unit condo site is now for sale with nothing built.

Pros & Cons of CPP (Devil's Advocate)

Benefits: speed, consistency, reduced political influence over individual developments, clearer rules for all parties, eliminates much of the site plan frustration council currently experiences.

Challenges: Reduces planning flexibility and staff discretion; removes Committee of Adjustment; some planners resist it as it defines and limits their role. CPP is not a new concept to experienced planners — the town examined it as recently as 2019 — but it requires a champion inside the planning department to move forward.

Path Forward — Agreed Next Steps

- **1. Pros & cons list:** David to draft using AI; committee to critique at next meeting.
- **2. Approach planning staff first** (before council): Get Amy (Director of Planning) and Nick on board. Ron to help facilitate introductions.
- **3. Invite Amy, Nick, and senior planner** to a future committee meeting to present the concept and gauge interest.
- **4. Identify a planning champion** — someone inside the department willing to push CPP forward. Without this, previous attempts have stalled.
- **5. Bring in Lincoln municipality** (already operating under CPP) to speak to practical implementation — either at a separate meeting or combined with staff.
- **6. Frame as an election issue** for the October 26th municipal election, via the committee's upcoming election website (notlelection.ca, going live May 1st).

Timeline note: Full implementation estimated at up to two years, though the group felt broad stakeholder benefit could accelerate this.

Supplementary: The Goodwill Framework (Gordon)

Gordon proposed framing NOTL's community character as **goodwill** — an intangible but financially real asset that can be damaged by poor development decisions. Using corporate case studies (Coca-Cola's New Coke, Lululemon founder controversy, VW Dieselgate — \$17.9B settlement in North America alone), he illustrated how neglecting goodwill carries real financial consequences.

Applied to NOTL, goodwill encompasses:

- Natural heritage
- Built heritage
- Neighbourhood character
- Employment and financial vitality

The idea is to engage developers in a shared conversation about protecting this goodwill — particularly developers with long-term holdings (e.g., rental properties) who have a vested interest in the community's continued appeal.

Environmental & Tree Canopy Concerns

Extended discussion arose around a nearby subdivision where 800 mature trees were removed and only ~300 subdivision trees planted in stripped subsoil — widely seen as inadequate. Key points raised:

- Subdivision trees planted in clay subsoil (topsoil removed) rarely thrive — examples from 1960s–70s Toronto neighbourhoods show trees half their expected size
- Each mature tree absorbs ~80 gallons of water per day; replacing 800 mature trees with 300 saplings leaves a major stormwater management deficit

- Wildlife (coyotes, thousands of nesting birds) lost from the cleared area with no mitigation plan
- The last undeveloped parcel inside Virgil's urban boundary (near Line 2, behind Bradfield Estates) is expected to come to market soon
- Provincial Greenbelt review — delayed from last year — has no confirmed date and is unlikely before 2027

Next Meeting

Date: Thursday, March 27th — same time and location (David to confirm space availability).

Primary agenda item: Review and critique the CPP pros & cons list; continue refining the presentation for town staff.

Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents' Association — Planning Committee