# Governance, Finance & Civic Engagement Committee (NOTLRA)

## Meeting Minutes

**Date:** Friday, May 8, 2026
**Time:** 2:00 PM – approximately 3:40 PM
**Location:** Board Room, Community Centre

**Chair:** Alan Young
**Recording Secretary:** Stuart McCormack (acting)

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# 1. Call to Order, Attendance & Approvals (2:00 – 2:05 PM)

The meeting was called to order at approximately 2:00 PM.

## Attendance

Present in person:

- Alan Young
- Tony Varga
- Bette Ann James
- Bob Bader
- Norm Arsenault
- Terry Davis
- Stuart McCormack

Absent Caroline Polgrabia.

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## Approval of Agenda

The agenda circulated prior to the meeting was approved.

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## Approval of Previous Minutes

The minutes of the April 24, 2026 meeting were approved.

- Moved by: Stuart McCormack
- Seconded by: Tony Varga
- Carried unanimously

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# 2. Administrative Announcements / Election Countdown & Key Dates Recap (2:05 – 2:10 PM)

## Committee Membership

Alan Young advised that Steve McGuiness is taking a leave of absence from the committee due to his intention to seek election to Town Council.

It was noted that:

- Steve may return to the committee if unsuccessful in the election.
- The committee now has vacancies to fill.

### Action Item

- Recruitment of additional committee members to be pursued through broader outreach to NOTLRA membership.

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## Bill 100 / Regional Governance

The committee discussed the recent passage of Bill 100, including:

- changes to Regional Council structure,
- appointment of a Regional Chair with strong mayor powers,
- and implications for Niagara-on-the-Lake council composition.

Discussion also addressed:

- uncertainty surrounding implementation timing,

- ministerial discretion under the legislation,
- and concerns regarding transparency in the Town's prior council reduction process.

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# Governance / Transparency Concerns

Stuart McCormack reported:

- filing a complaint with the Ontario Ombudsman regarding the process used by Town Council to reduce council size,
- concerns respecting:
    - transparency,
    - procedural fairness,
    - use of an "information item" to advance substantive governance changes,
    - waiver of procedural rules,
    - and absence of meaningful public participation.

Discussion also occurred regarding:

- whether the committee or NOTLRA should issue a public statement concerning the process.

### Action Item

- Stuart McCormack to revise and circulate a draft statement regarding council transparency and council composition changes for review by the Chair and committee.

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# Election Countdown

The committee reviewed key election dates:

- Nominations opened May 1, 2026
- Nomination deadline: August 21, 2026
- Election Day: October 26, 2026

It was noted that:

- at least two candidates had already filed for Lord Mayor,
- additional council candidacies were anticipated.

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## Candidate Outreach Follow-Up

The committee reviewed prior outreach to incumbent councillors regarding re-election intentions.

It was reported that:

- responses had been limited,
- several responses were non-committal,
- and only one councillor had clearly confirmed intentions.

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# 3. Motion to Amend Committee's April 24 Decision on 2026 Resident Survey (2:10 – 2:15 PM)

Alan Young introduced a motion to revise the committee's earlier decision respecting the 2026 residents survey.

## Motion

Resolved that the Committee's decision regarding the 2026 residents survey made at its April 24 meeting be revised, as follows:

1. The issues canvassed in the 2026 residents survey be identical to those in the 2025 residents survey.
2. The structure of the 2025 survey be revised in 2026 to provide more in-depth information from respondents about the issues.

- Moved by: Stuart McCormack
- Seconded by: Bob Bader
- Vote: All in favour
- Motion approved unanimously

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# 4. Resident Survey Review & Committee Direction (2:15 – 2:25 PM)

# Overview

Norm Arsenault presented the revised survey structure developed following discussions with Mike Ennamorato.

The revised survey:

- grouped issues into broader thematic categories,
- reduced survey fatigue through issue prioritization,
- and utilized rotating issue order to improve response quality.

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# Survey Structure

The committee reviewed:

- issue categories,
- prioritization methodology,
- wording of issue prompts,
- and proposed respondent ranking structure.

Discussion focused on:

- balancing comprehensiveness with survey length,
- maintaining clarity and neutrality,
- and avoiding respondent fatigue.

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# Key Revisions Discussed

The committee reviewed and revised wording and issue selections in multiple sections, including:

- Strong Mayor powers
- Council procedures
- Recreation facilities
- Childcare availability
- Stormwater and flooding
- Natural area protection
- Heritage preservation and demolition controls
- Planning and development
- Developer influence
- Population growth

- Traffic and truck routing
- Transportation and cycling infrastructure
- Tourism impacts
- Housing and affordability

Consensus direction was provided to Norm Arsenault regarding revisions.

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# Survey Accessibility & Technical Issues

The committee discussed:

- smartphone usability,
- formatting inconsistencies,
- accessibility,
- and proofreading concerns.

### Privacy Language

Stuart McCormack proposed inclusion of language clarifying that:

- email addresses are collected solely for survey integrity and duplicate prevention purposes,
- responses will be analyzed in aggregate form only,
- and individual responses will not be publicly identified.

The committee supported inclusion of such language.

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# Board Review

It was agreed that:

- the revised survey should be circulated to the NOTLRA Board,
- together with committee recommendations,
- prior to public release.

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# Action Items

- Norm Arsenault to:
    - revise survey language and formatting,

    - incorporate committee feedback,
    - consult further with Mike Ennamorato as required,
    - and prepare final survey draft.
- Stuart McCormack to:
    - attach revised survey materials to the forthcoming Board agenda package.

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# 5. Election Website Review & Committee Direction (2:25 – 3:00 PM)

## Website Overview

Norm Arsenault presented updated drafts of the proposed NOTL election website.

Discussion addressed:

- homepage structure,
- navigation,
- issue organization,
- candidate pages,
- accessibility compliance,
- and neutrality considerations.

The committee acknowledged and thanked Norm Arsenault for extensive work completed on both:

- the survey initiative, and
- the election website.

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## Candidate Profiles

Significant discussion occurred regarding:

- neutrality,
- presentation of candidate information,
- and avoiding appearance of endorsement.

The committee discussed:

- linking directly to candidate websites,

- avoiding reproduction of campaign-style promotional language,
- and future inclusion of issue-based candidate comparisons.

### Committee Direction

Consensus emerged that:

- candidate pages should primarily:
    - identify candidates,
    - provide links to official candidate websites and contact information,
    - and avoid reproducing campaign promotional narratives.

The committee further discussed future development of:

- issue-based comparison tools,
- "what they said / what they did" frameworks,
- and scorecard concepts.

No formal endorsement policy was adopted.

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## Website Tone & Compliance

Discussion also addressed:

- third-party advertising compliance,
- non-partisan positioning,
- accessibility (AODA) considerations,
- and website readability.

Norm Arsenault advised that:

- website content had been reviewed for neutrality,
- accessibility improvements had been implemented,
- and the site remained dynamic and subject to ongoing updates.

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## Issue Pages

The committee reviewed proposed issue sections, including:

- taxation and affordability,
- housing,

- short-term rentals,
- traffic and parking,
- water and wastewater,
- governance and transparency,
- tourism,
- and development.

The committee generally supported the proposed issue framework, subject to further refinement.

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## Social Media Discussion

The committee discussed:

- possible use of Facebook and related platforms to direct traffic to the election website,
- moderation concerns,
- and risks associated with public commenting functionality.

No final decision was made regarding social media strategy.

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## Action Items

- Committee members to submit website comments and proofreading suggestions to Stuart McCormack for consolidation and forwarding to Norm Arsenault.
- Norm Arsenault to:
    - revise candidate profile presentation,
    - simplify candidate pages,
    - continue website refinement,
    - and prepare additional content sections as directed.

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# 6. Candidate Engagement Plan Update (3:00 – 3:05 PM)

## Discussion

The committee discussed:

- continuing candidate outreach,

- future candidate questionnaires,
- and potential issue comparison frameworks.

No formal motions were adopted.

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# 7. Candidate Questionnaire Discussion (3:05 – 3:15 PM)

## Discussion

The committee discussed:

- further development of candidate questions,
- future committee and Board input,
- and possible issue-based scorecard approaches.

It was noted that:

- future questionnaires may inform website comparison tools,
- but methodology and governance considerations require additional review.

No final questionnaire was approved.

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# 8. Workstream Updates & Assignments (3:15 – 3:20 PM)

## Municipal Finance / Infrastructure

Discussion continued regarding:

- infrastructure readiness,
- development pressures,
- traffic impacts,
- wastewater concerns,
- and growth management.

These issues were incorporated into both:

- the survey framework, and
- proposed election website issue pages.

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# 9. Review of Action Items, Owners & Deadlines (3:20 – 3:25 PM)

## Key Action Items Confirmed

- Stuart McCormack:
  - revise and circulate draft governance/transparency statement,
  - compile website feedback,
  - circulate Board materials respecting survey.
  - Provide Tony Varga financial details for study prior to a meeting
- Norm Arsenault:
  - finalize survey revisions,
  - continue election website development,
  - revise candidate profile approach,
  - and coordinate technical implementation.
- Committee members:
  - review survey and website materials,
  - submit comments and revisions.
- Recruitment:
  - pursue additional committee members.

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# 10. Any Other Business & Adjournment (3:25 – 3:40 PM)

Additional discussion occurred regarding:

- election communications,
- candidate engagement,
- website evolution,
- and future committee work-streams.
- a question was raised regarding if/how Committee members could engage in election activities (eg. canvassing on behalf of candidates, providing financial support, placing

candidate signs on front lawns etc.). It was noted that this would be discussed at the next Board meeting.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:40 PM.

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# Summary of Major Outcomes

- April 24 survey decision formally amended.
- Revised survey structure approved in principle.
- Significant committee direction provided respecting survey issues and wording.
- Election website structure generally endorsed, subject to revisions.
- Candidate profile approach revised toward neutrality and external linking.
- Governance concerns regarding council composition process reaffirmed.
- Further Board review required respecting:
    - survey rollout,
    - website evolution,
    - candidate comparison tools,
    - and possible public communications.