

## **Honey, We Shrunk the Council**

### **Residents Association Objects to NOTL'S Secret Move to Downsize**

**By Stuart McCormack**

*May 2026* – On March 24, with zero public input or consultation, Niagara-on-the-Lake's Town Council approved a resolution to reduce its ranks by two, from eight down to six councillors, with the change to be implemented in advance of the 2026 municipal election. The total lack of transparency around this decision is extremely disturbing, as is the disrespect for NOTL residents that Council demonstrated in making it, irrespective of public opinion on the optimum size of Council.

Item 15.1, "Council Composition – Lower-Tier Municipalities within Niagara Region," was listed under the "Information Report" section of Council's March 24 agenda. There was no indication that Council intended to discuss, or vote to change, the size of NOTL's council. In fact, Council had to waive its own procedural rules, which it did by an 8-1 vote, to do so. The result was that a key decision on the structure of the body we elect to govern our town was made with no public discussion, either for or against the idea.

There may be good, valid reasons to downsize NOTL's Council, or it may be a bad idea. But due to the way Council managed this issue, residents had no opportunity to hear the rationale for the reduction, or express their views, in advance.

Why the haste? Why the secrecy? It is no secret that Ontario Premier Doug Ford seems intent on stripping away local representation and democratic governance across Ontario.

The push by Ford-appointee, former Niagara Regional Chair Bob Gale, for amalgamation of municipalities in the region made that clear. As did the Ford government's enactment of Bill 100, the Better Regional Governance Act, 2026, which authorizes broader restructuring measures, including a reduction in the size of NOTL's Council.

Our organization, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association (NOTLRA) believes that NOTL Council's secretive decision to downsize was unfair and undemocratic. Public opinion and consultation matter. Particularly on decisions as important as this.

NOTLRA believes that public confidence in municipal governance is strengthened when the people we elect are clear about their intentions and act in a transparent manner. When Council intends to consider key proposals, they should be put forward in advance, so the public can weigh the pros and cons. Residents should be able to have their say before decisions are made, not after.

Municipal governance depends not only on legal authority, but also on public confidence in the openness and fairness of decision-making processes.

Our Association encourages the Town to review this matter, its approach to where decision items are placed on Council agendas, and its notice procedures, to ensure transparency and public confidence in NOTL's municipal governance in the future. We also encourage the public to look more closely at how the people we have entrusted to govern our town make decisions.

***Stuart McCormack is president of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association***