

**Notes from January 30/2026 Meeting**  
(Thank you to David Jones)

**- Introduction and Committee Structure**

- Peter Neame explains the committee's role in researching issues and returning recommendations to the Residents Association board for review and possible action.

- Vince Peca asks about the Residents Association Board's connection to town council; Peter Neame and Ron Simkus clarify the Association is an independent nonprofit that communicates with council but is separate.

- Ron Simkus (board member) reiterates the board's intent: the committee should operate semi-independently, provide professional recommendations, and the board will manage external communications and legal exposure. The board may sometimes ask committee members to speak publicly on issues.

**- Committee Member Introductions**

- Peter Neame: background in biology/ecology, landscape design and urban/community design experience; motivation to protect urban design principles in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

- David Jones: background in POS/software, property ownership and hotel/retail development in Niagara-on-the-Lake; concerns about recent development approvals, heritage/scale, and short-term rentals.

- Lidija Biro: background in education, wine studies, environmental volunteering; intends to bring a green/environmental lens to development.

- Vince Peca: background in corporate real estate (ScotiaBank) and consulting; interest in contributing real-estate expertise.

- Brian Marshall: background in architecture, design-build entrepreneurship, writing and heritage consulting; volunteer interest in protecting town character.

- Gordon Stratford: registered architect and urban designer; experience assessing projects and advocating for design-sensitive outcomes.

- Norm Arsenault: past council member, founder/chair of environmental advisory work, instrumental in the town's climate change adaptation planning.

- Ron Simkus (board liaison) provides context on committee purpose and board support.

## **- Committee Structure, Roles and Process**

- Norm Arsenault proposed rotating chair; Lidija Biro volunteered and was appointed to try the chair role.
- Discussion about secretary/minutes and using AI transcription; David Jones offered to trial recording/transcription.
- Agreed to schedule a substantive follow-up meeting in two weeks (tentative: Friday, Feb 13 at noon), face-to-face with a virtual option. Frequency thereafter to be decided by the committee.

## **- Topics and Priorities**

- The committee's remit includes reviewing zoning, site plans, built form/urban design guidelines, development proposals, density, and major planning areas; the board provided a suggested topic list for committee prioritization.
- Members agreed to review both specific projects (e.g., Parliament Oak, Royal George-related issues) and planning/process improvements.
- Community Planning Permit-like approaches (CPPs or similar) were proposed for future agenda discussion; committee agreed to add CPPs/process review to the next meeting.

## **- Examples of Past Project Analyses (presented by Gordon Stratford)**

- Gordon demonstrated prior visual analyses and communication materials used to influence outcomes (Niagara Stone Road, Queen Street, several hotel/site proposals). Emphasis on clear visuals, context sections, view-impact analyses, landscape/soil considerations, and communicating design consequences to lay audiences and staff.

## **- Challenges Identified**

- David Jones and others expressed concern about approvals that appear inconsistent with zoning, massing, conservation district intent, and heritage character.
- Norm Arsenault and others noted provincial and regulatory pressures (appeals, delegated approvals) that limit municipal discretion and create precedent concerns.
- Ron Simkus highlighted engineering and technical deficiencies in some applications (e.g., Parliament Oak) and stressed the need for earlier, competent technical review prior to council decisions.

**- Communication, Resources and Next Steps**

- A private committee web page (maintained by the Association) will host background documents, development application links, and relevant materials; Norm will continue updating it.

**- Action items identified:**

- Compile project files and studies into a PDF and circulate to committee members (noted in meeting as an item to be handled by committee leads / Norm/Lidija).

- Committee encouraged to recruit additional members (including younger participants) by referral.

- Next meeting: tentatively Friday, Feb 13 at noon (face-to-face with virtual option), with CPPs/process review on the agenda.