

**Governance, Finance and Civic Engagement Committee
Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association (NOTLRA)**

Meeting Minutes

Date: Friday, June 26, 2026

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 3:10 p.m.

Location: Board Room, Kai Wiens Family Farm, Concession 2

Present

- Alan Young (Chair)
- Stuart McCormack (Secretary)
- Norm Arsenault
- Bob Bader
- Terry Davis
- Tony Varga
- Bette Ann James
- Caroline Polgrabia
- Kai Wiens (arrived later)

Regrets

- Patrick Gedge

1. Welcome, Attendance, Approval of Agenda and Approval of June 12 Minutes

The Chair called the meeting to order at approximately 2:00 p.m. Attendees identified themselves for the record.

The agenda was approved, subject to an amendment to address the Candidate Engagement Plan and related scheduling issues.

The minutes of the June 12, 2026 meeting were approved.

2. Election Countdown and Key Dates Recap

The Chair noted that 56 days remained until the close of nominations and 121 days remained until Election Day.

The Committee noted the importance of completing the principal election-related work during the remaining pre-election period.

3. Resident Survey Response Update and Analysis

Norm Arsenault presented a preliminary update on the 2026 resident survey. He advised that the survey results are Old Town-heavy, but that some differences are emerging among the different communities. Planning and development consistently appear as the leading concerns, including in the open-ended responses.

The survey received 251 responses. Norm advised that the response rate from the membership was approximately 48%, which was considered strong, particularly given the length of the survey. It was noted that the 2025 survey received 345 responses.

Norm advised that the survey was too long and that future surveys should be shorter and easier to complete and analyze.

A more polished executive summary is being prepared with Michael. The Committee discussed publishing material on the website, preparing a press release or media summary, and making the full survey available online once finalized.

The Committee also discussed using the survey results to inform candidate engagement, scorecards, and broader public communications. Members emphasized that public messaging should be constructive and should focus on issues that residents want improved.

4. Agricultural Community Engagement

Bette Ann James advised that she and Kai Wiens had begun discussing a Facebook-based approach to agricultural community engagement. Kai had not yet had an opportunity to fully develop the initiative due to farming commitments.

Kai Wiens later joined the meeting and outlined his view that Facebook and other social media discussion are the most practical ways to engage people on agricultural issues. He noted that formal meetings with the agricultural community are unlikely to attract broad participation, given the demands on producers and the role already played by commodity groups.

Kai explained that agricultural issues are often misunderstood and that useful engagement may come from posing specific questions online and correcting misconceptions about agricultural land use, agri-tourism, wineries, labour issues and development pressures on agricultural lands.

The Committee agreed that agricultural engagement should proceed primarily through issue-based social media activity rather than a stand-alone public meeting.

5. Finance Sub-Committee Update and Work Plan

Tony Varga reported on his work to identify and review available municipal financial information. He advised that he had spoken with Joe Dias, who provided a link to the Ontario Financial Information Return (FIR) website. Tony is becoming familiar with the FIR material and is also reviewing the Town's OpenBook portal.

Tony noted that the OpenBook portal does not appear to allow downloading, which limits its usefulness. He is reviewing the capital projects budget and beginning to consider year-over-year comparisons.

Norm Arsenault advised that a budget archive has been added to the Governance section of the NOTLRA website, including municipal budgets going back several years. Norm also referred to recent Town reporting on outstanding infrastructure projects and offered to circulate the relevant material.

Tony advised that he had reached out to Steve McGuinness and expects to follow up when Steve returns.

6. Strong Mayor Powers Cartoon / Visual Update

The Committee reviewed the Strong Mayor Powers visual circulated before the meeting. Members expressed support for the image and its ability to communicate the issue clearly.

Members discussed whether the visual should be used in the Lake Report or another publication, either alone or with supporting text. It was agreed that explanatory text should accompany the visual, emphasizing the importance of the election and the implications of Strong Mayor Powers for local democratic accountability.

Stuart McCormack agreed to prepare draft text to accompany the visual and to provide it to Alan Young for review before circulation to the Committee.

7. Candidate Engagement Plan Update

Bette Ann James and Norm Arsenault reported that the preferred dates for candidate engagement meetings had encountered scheduling conflicts. Norm advised that he is pursuing Friday evening dates through the school board process.

The Committee discussed the need for a Plan B venue. Caroline Polgrabia agreed to explore a potential alternative venue and report back to the Committee.

Norm advised that insurance should be manageable if an alternate venue is used, as the venue can be added as a third party to the policy. The Committee agreed that venue arrangements should remain a priority and that alternatives should be actively pursued.

8. Candidate Engagement Scorecard Consolidation

Stuart McCormack reported that he had spoken with Bette Ann James regarding the candidate engagement scorecard. They have agreed to work together and report back at the next meeting.

The Committee noted that the resident survey results should inform the scorecard topics, since the survey identifies issues of greatest concern to residents.

9. Promotional Material Options / Pricing Update

Bette Ann James presented preliminary pricing for promotional buttons. Suppliers reviewed included Button Brothers, Vistaprint, Sticker Mule and other online suppliers.

Bette Ann noted that Button Brothers appears to be Toronto-based and that pricing for 500 buttons was approximately 60 cents per button. Vistaprint was estimated at approximately 80 cents per button. Members discussed the importance of supplier reliability, Canadian sourcing and button size.

The Committee discussed whether to produce an initial run of a single button design or multiple designs. Members also discussed how the buttons might be distributed, including through local businesses with an optional donation box.

10. New Promotional Concepts: Agriculture, Heritage, Governance and Glendale

The Committee discussed possible additional button and promotional concepts intended to speak to residents across all communities in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Terry Davis had circulated proposed language before the meeting. Members agreed that the concepts were useful, but that much of the proposed language was too lengthy for a button and may be better suited to an advertisement or explanatory communication.

Members discussed themes including balanced planning, preserving agricultural and heritage landscapes, transparent governance, quality of life, and community identity. The phrase "Putting our communities first" was discussed favourably as a possible broader message.

The Committee agreed that Caroline Polgrabia, Terry Davis and Bette Ann James would form a Button Working Group to develop recommendations. Bob Bader also agreed to contribute ideas.

11. Review Action Items, Owners and Deadlines

The Committee agreed that action items would be captured in the minutes and reviewed at the next meeting.

12. Any Other Business

Stuart McCormack reported on the municipal governance article series. Articles have been prepared or are being prepared on the standardized municipal Code of Conduct, Freedom of Information, the Ontario Ombudsman, the Integrity Commissioner and Criminal Code provisions relevant to municipal officials. These articles will point readers to more detailed material on the NOTLRA website.

Members discussed the Governance section of the NOTLRA website and the need to ensure that posted material is easy to find.

Stuart also reported on the notlra.ca website and the potential for public confusion. He advised that a draft CIRA complaint has been prepared, but that current fee and process information has been difficult to confirm. The Committee discussed the limited traction of the site, the risk of drawing more attention to it, and the need to monitor the situation. No immediate legal action will be taken unless circumstances change.

Bette Ann James advised that she has been keeping screenshots of relevant online activity in case the history is needed later.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:10 p.m. on motion by Caroline Polgrabia, seconded by Tony Varga.

Action Items Register

Action Item	Owner	Target / Timing
Finalize resident survey analysis and executive summary.	Norm Arseneault / Michael	Next meeting
Prepare website summary and media release / press summary based on survey findings.	Norm Arseneault / Michael	Next meeting
Ensure survey material is available to Committee members and, once finalized, to the broader membership.	Norm Arseneault	Next meeting / Ongoing
Continue agricultural Facebook engagement initiative and develop issue-based questions for discussion.	Kai Wiens / Bette Ann James	Ongoing
Continue municipal finance research, including FIR data, OpenBook, capital projects and budget archive review.	Tony Varga	Next meeting / Ongoing
Follow up with Steve McGinnis regarding municipal finance analysis.	Tony Varga	When Steve returns
Circulate relevant Town report on outstanding infrastructure projects.	Norm Arseneault	As soon as available
Prepare explanatory text for the Strong Mayor Powers visual and provide to Alan Young for review.	Stuart McCormack	Next meeting
Continue pursuing school board venue dates for candidate engagement meetings.	Norm Arseneault / Bette Ann James	As soon as possible
Approach Vine Ridge Academy as a possible alternate venue.	Caroline Polgrabia	As soon as possible
Develop revised Candidate Scorecard proposal informed by resident survey results.	Stuart McCormack / Bette Ann James	Next meeting
Develop recommendations for campaign buttons and related promotional messaging.	Caroline Polgrabia / Terry Davis / Bette Ann James	Next meeting
Provide additional ideas for button and promotional messaging.	Bob Bader	Next meeting
Continue municipal governance article series for	Stuart McCormack	Ongoing

publication and website support.		
Review Governance webpage layout and ensure articles are easy to locate.	Norm Arsenault / Stuart McCormack	Ongoing
Monitor notlra.ca website and related online activity; report back if it becomes more problematic.	Stuart McCormack / Norm Arsenault / Bette Ann James	Ongoing