

**Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association
2026 Member Survey**

Summary Report

**For General Distribution
July, 2026**

NOTLRA 2026 MEMBER SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association (NOTLRA) launched a survey of its members in May/June 2026 as a follow-up to the inaugural survey conducted in May of 2025. In both cases, the purpose of the investigation has been to obtain member perspectives on the town's current status and possible future developments in the areas of governance, economic growth, infrastructure, changes to the built and natural environment, service delivery and overall quality of life. With updated information in hand, the NOTLRA will be better prepared to support the residential community and advocate for change, support proposed initiatives or suggest new undertakings, as appropriate.

Method

A questionnaire was developed by the NOTLRA Board with a focus on soliciting information on the degree to which members place importance on the NOTLRA addressing various issues and initiatives extant in town, and the degree to which they support recent local governance changes imposed by the Province.

Survey invitations were issued via email to members with email addresses on record, and to members sourced via Facebook. The survey was in field from May 26th to June 13th, 2026. Data were compiled and analyzed immediately following the close of field.

In total, 252 questionnaires were completed - 229 via the email list and 23 via the Facebook invitation. The email participation rate sits at 47%, which is quite respectable for a survey of this type, with similar engagement in Old Town (48%) versus the rest of NOTL (50%). The returns from the Facebook solicitation are very low, producing a sample that is too small to project and likely not representative of the Facebook member population. As a result, the analysis has focused on the email returns only.

Profile

It is important to understand the profile of the sample relative to the NOTL population as a whole if there is an intention to project the results to the total citizenry rather than to NOTLRA members only.

An examination of the profile suggests that the sample is skewed relative to the NOTL population. In particular, while approximately 35% of the NOTL population resides in Old Town according to the Census, 61% of the member sample has an Old Town address. Moreover, the following age distribution confirms a substantially older skew among survey participants.

TABLE 1 Age:	Percent of...	
	NOTLRA Members (from email sample) (229) %	NOTL Adult Population (from Census) (16,155) %
Under 65 Years of Age	23	57
65 Years or Older	77	43

As one might expect, given this age distribution, the sample also skews heavily toward smaller households (89% one or two persons versus 54% for the NOTL population) and under-represents households with children.

With respect to gender, the sample skews toward females (59% versus 51% in the general NOTL population). This is a modest imbalance and becomes less concerning when it is realized that women make up a larger proportion of the over-represented senior population.

Implications of Profile Dissonance in Interpreting Survey results

In attempting to project results of the member survey to the total resident population, the stated importance of issues will be diluted with respect to areas of inquiry that are naturally of critical interest to under-represented communities such as youth, families and those residing outside of the historical/heritage districts. This is something that must be kept in mind when managing the data and interpreting the results.

The sample has not been weighted to population statistics in order to nullify the effects of these demographic and geographic imbalances. Still, these effects can be countered, to a considerable degree, by examining results in total and among under-represented communities separately. Our reporting does, in fact, engage in this sort of segmented analysis where sample size permits.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Importance Ratings

As the core area of inquiry, residents were asked to indicate the level of importance they place on the NOTLRA addressing each of 44 areas of possible engagement with current issues, developments or areas of public service/infrastructure delivery affecting the quality of life in Niagara-on-the-Lake. These areas of possible engagement fall into three broad categories: social issues, local government, and quality of life and community character.

It should be stated at the outset that virtually all of these possible engagement areas generate reasonably high scores for importance. None is considered unimportant by the residential community as a whole. However, the NOTLRA must set priorities if it is to use its resources wisely and maximize its impact. There are certainly differences across these engagement areas in terms of the intensity of feeling and level of urgency they evoke. The NOTLRA should focus on the top tier issues and, to the extent possible, establish thematic links among them while being mindful of any differences in issue perception among those groups that are underrepresented in our sample, but important segments of the broader residential community.

The following table summarizes the top box scores (Extremely Important and Total Extremely/Very Important) for all 44 areas assessed. They are ordered according to the degree of perceived importance they stimulate (from high to low) within the sample as a whole. The table also breaks out results for important sub-groups for which adequate sample is available for analysis.

The priority ordering yields some interesting patterns that tell us a fair bit about the underlying sentiments of NOTLRA members and of residents more broadly. To make these patterns somewhat easier to discern, a colour coding scheme has been applied to separate out top tier from secondary and tertiary areas of importance. The formula used to partition the data set in this way has admittedly been defined somewhat arbitrarily, but there is a basic logic to the approach and, importantly, the results are revealing. Those areas in the top tier are considered to be “Extremely Important” by at least two-thirds of respondents or either “Extremely Important” or “Very Important” by at least 9-in-10. Those in the second tier are considered to be “Extremely Important” by between one-half and two-thirds of respondents or, should this criteria not be met, are considered “Extremely Important” or “Very Important” by at least three-quarters. The third tier areas of potential engagement fall below the second tier thresholds, but it should be remembered that they nonetheless carry a fair amount of weight among a substantial number of individuals.

When this scheme is applied to the subgroups singled out for analysis (in the four right-hand columns), differences and similarities in priorities readily emerge. Focusing some attention on these points of congruence and contrast make it possible to extrapolate results from the survey of NOTLRA members to the broader resident population with more confidence.

TABLE 2 IMPORTANCE RATINGS	1st Tier 2nd Tier 3rd Tier	Percent of Members.. Stating... Important					
		In Total (229) %		Not Old Town (71) %		Under 65 Years (50) %	
Areas of Potential Engagement:		Extre- mely	Ext./ Very	Extre- mely	Ext./ Very	Extre- mely	Ext./ Very
Reducing developer influence on planning		88	97	82	92	72	86
Maintaining clear accountability for major decisions		86	96	83	94	84	94
Transparency of local council decision-making		85	97	83	94	80	94
Maintaining democratic oversight in council		83	97	79	93	80	94
Managing scale and density of new development		83	96	79	94	74	92
Public consulting effectiveness (feeling heard)		81	96	80	94	78	94
Protection of historic buildings and districts		75	93	76	94	68	90
Transparency of budgeting and spending		73	95	82	76	84	94
Balancing tourism with preservation		72	95	72	92	70	92
Compatibility of new buildings with heritage character		71	95	66	90	64	90
Access to healthcare services (GPs/ urgent care)		70	91	70	86	62	90
Value for the money of municipal services		68	92	75	93	80	92
Balancing tourism econ. benefit with residential impact		68	89	62	85	62	86
Infrastructure keeping pace with growth		66	96	65	96	60	96
Development pressure on farmland		66	91	69	90	68	92
Protection of tender fruit lands		65	92	72	92	68	92
Protection of natural areas and biodiversity		62	89	70	86	64	82
Emergency service response times		62	88	63	86	66	88
Impact of tourism on quality of life for residents		61	86	58	83	44	82
Tree canopy protection and removal bylaws		61	87	65	85	64	82
Affordability of property taxes		60	84	70	87	66	88
Preservation of vineyards and rural character		59	89	70	90	68	90
Storm water management and flood risk		58	86	58	86	56	82
Availability of long-term care and assisted living		55	86	58	83	46	80
Aging in place supports		55	85	55	85	48	84
Over-tourism in peak seasons		55	79	52	79	46	78
Impact of population growth on small town character		52	83	58	83	60	84
Truck traffic and routing		52	82	49	80	50	70
Congestion in Old Town and key corridors		50	76	54	75	44	64
Short term rental impact on housing supply		50	76	46	68	44	74
Housing for seniors downsizing in NOTL		48	79	42	72	36	62
Transportation options for seniors		45	78	54	77	46	82
Speeding in residential areas		43	73	49	77	48	72
Pedestrian infrastructure and safety		36	70	39	68	48	70
Social isolation among seniors and others		33	72	41	73	36	68
Seasonal vs. permanent population pressure		31	71	31	65	34	74
Cycling infrastructure and safety		28	57	39	56	44	64
Lack of public transit options within NOTL		27	54	25	52	36	68
Affordability to live in NOTL for young families		23	51	21	46	24	42
Availability of affordable housing		22	54	25	56	14	58
Growth concentration in specific areas (e.g. Glendale)		21	57	30	65	28	62
Lack of indoor recreation facilities		19	44	17	46	30	54
Connecting to St. Catharines and Niagara Falls		19	43	27	46	30	52
Availability of child care services		10	34	8	27	10	36

Results among total members indicate that, while residents have many issues that are important to them and should be addressed by the NOTLRA, they are quite clear on top priorities. Their main focus is on preservation of what they have more so than on the addition of new services, amenities or upgrades. And, as a complement to such sentiments, they demand a local government structure that functions as a partner in achieving these preservation goals. There is overwhelming concern that developers hold too much power and essentially dictate the town's direction. Consequently, there is an exceptionally strong desire to ensure that local council genuinely listens to residents, rather than ignore their concerns, and that council, planners and the administration more generally, uphold fundamental democratic principles rather than suspend them in deference to developers and other powerful interests. Residents not only feel unheard, but their sentiments go beyond this. They sense a need to actively prod local government to act with accountability and transparency, and to refrain from blocking insight to the decision-making process and restricting access to information.

Certainly, residents' notion of preservation has much to do with protecting heritage buildings and districts while managing the design, scale and density of new development to ensure compatibility with the heritage character of the town. However, the conception of preservation also goes beyond these urban aspects to embrace protection of natural biodiversity, concerns about development pressure on agricultural lands and the preservation of tender fruit lands and vineyards.

There is a strong sense that tourism growth is a major catalyst that gives rise to resident anxiety about preservation. Residents feel it is important to achieve balance between tourism growth and preservation and between the tourism economy and its impact on residential communities. By implication, there is a widespread belief that the appropriate balance does not currently exist, leading to "over-tourism", pressure on residential amenities, the exacerbation of traffic issues (parking, speeding, congestion), the negative effects of short-term rentals and, overall, undermining of the quality of life that residents are adamant about preserving. Concerns about growth outpacing the infrastructure required to support it is also closely tied to the tourism economy, although other factors are in play as well, such as the scale of some new housing developments.

The above discussion provides the NOTLRA with thematic focal points for directing its resources in an effort to support residents. The main themes might be summarized as preservation and, related to this, supportive governance and the achievement of tourism balance. To underscore the critical nature of these themes in the eyes of members (and, by extension, residents), it should be noted that they all garner importance ratings that are as high or higher than those associated with basic pocket book issues such as property tax affordability and value-for-the-money of municipal services.

This is not to say, however, that residents place little importance on new services and infrastructure that are not specifically tied to preservation. In certain cases, there is simply acknowledgement of the existence of non-negotiable fundamentals that must continue to be offered at a reasonably high standard – access to healthcare service, quick emergency service response times and the mitigation of flood risk are foremost among them. These are likely "non-negotiable" for many. Beyond this, there is definitely a recognition that some new offerings would have a direct impact on enhancing or maintaining current and future quality of life. In particular, within the secondary tier, there exists a cluster of services related to seniors' living that stimulates considerable attention as an area of importance. These are tied to long-term care, aging in place supports, housing downsizing opportunities, reducing social isolation and transit facilitation. These infrastructure and service elements are undoubtedly of greatest importance to older seniors, a group that is over-represented in the

total sample. Nonetheless, it should be kept in mind that this is one of the fastest growing demographic segments of the NOTL population. These concerns should, therefore, carry some weight as part of an effort to sustain quality of life for residents into the future.

Variations in Stated Importance by Sub-Group

The above discussion uses the terms “members” and “residents” interchangeably. There is some justification for this insofar as those members coming from groups within the total resident population that are under-represented within the NOTLRA member base largely agree with the majority opinion on most issues. The tier structure we are using as an analytical tool to assess importance remains fairly consistent whether applied to the total sample, to the sub-group of members residing outside of Old Town or to those under 65 years of age. In these broad terms, all groups tend to agree on priorities.

This not to say that differences do not exist. Closer scrutiny of Table 1 indicates that there are some differences in intensity of belief about certain issues and some variance in priority ranking that are noteworthy. These should be taken into account by the NOTLRA in an effort to appeal to, and speak for, the broader community of residents.

For instance, pocket book issues (taxation and value-for-money of public services) tend to be elevated to a somewhat higher level of priority among members residing outside of Old Town and among those who have not yet reached their retirement years. This is likely a function of both the geographic distribution of household financial wealth and one’s closeness to the day-to-day challenges of wage generation.

By contrast, while the desire to reduce the influence of developers and manage the scope of their projects are high priority focal points across the board, the intensity of feeling reaches its apex in Old Town, and among older residents of that community in particular. Nearness to the location of many of these projects undoubtedly has a role to play here. Proximity possibly suppresses the moderating effects of potential economic benefits and job opportunities which might otherwise slightly cool the emotional heat such issues generate. These benefits are perhaps somewhat more readily considered by younger residents who are still in the work force. For the same reasons, the more youthful segments perhaps have a marginally higher tolerance level for some of the negative byproducts of tourism growth that affect quality of life.

Attention to seniors issues predictably has an older age skew. That said, these issues are still rated highly for importance by many of those under 65 years of age. By way of explanation, the older segments of the under-65 group likely have a fairly clear line of sight on the not-too-distant future and recognize the eventual need for lifestyle adaptations and age-related supports.

At the same time, when compared with their older cohorts, those under 65 years of age demonstrate a more youthful, active orientation through a greater concern with accessing public transportation options to aid mobility and through the degree of importance they place on connectivity to the larger cities in the Niagara Region. The tendency to place comparatively more importance on securing indoor recreation facilities and high quality cycling and pedestrian infrastructure also align with a more physically active lifestyle. Even though these concerns remain within the tertiary tier among younger

members, the higher top-box (“Extremely Important”) scores they are assigned within this segment are noteworthy.

When turning to the preservation of biodiversity and rural character, again we see high levels of importance placed on these issues across all member groups. The fact that the intensity of concern peaks among those residing outside of Old Town with closer day-to-day ties to nature and agriculture is certainly understandable. This is a function of the same process we see in play with regard to residents of Old Town and their concerns about proposed development – the emotional temperature is raised when events take place in your own back yard.

It should be reiterated that, despite the variability in response patterns discussed above, the hierarchy of general priorities noted among total members largely remains intact from one segment to the next. This gives us greater confidence in projecting member priorities to NOTL residents more broadly. The differences noted across sub-groups are more a matter of nuance. The NOTLRA should turn to them as a means of providing appropriate colour to its advocacy and actions on behalf of all constituent resident communities.

As a caveat to this ability to project and generalize, it should be mentioned that the representation of young families with children and youth is depressed within the sample, at least in relation to the total NOTL population. Issues such as lack of daycare availability and generally poor housing affordability likely carry greater weight within the broader resident population where these groups have far more presence. Unfortunately, there is no means for us to determine whether this is true, since the sample sizes are insufficient within these more youthful segments to support separate analyses.

Open-ended Responses

Prior to being presented with specific elements to rate for importance, respondents were given the opportunity to offer their own issues or concerns that they feel it critical to address. The results of this unstructured exercise largely confirm the key issues uncovered by the importance rating questions. However, the open-ended responses do shed some light on the key triggers giving impetus to the growth of these concerns and points of anxiety.

There is virtually universal consensus that development is proceeding too rapidly and without appropriate forethought or guard rails. The tourism economy is singled out as the primary driver of unbridled development. Correspondingly, there is a widespread belief that NOTL is suffering the consequences of “over-tourism” and the concomitant destruction of its unique physical heritage and overall quality of life. Moreover, there is a majority opinion that this process has been taking place without appropriate avenues for the public to meaningfully voice their concerns. In the eyes of many, the incumbent local council and the town’s bureaucratic apparatus have largely ignored residents and are too closely aligned with developers. Residents feel unheard and that their attempts to be heard have been effectively thwarted.

With regard to specific events triggering these sentiments, most are well known. It is no surprise that protracted wrangling and turmoil associated with the Rand Estate has created a hot house for dissatisfaction and acrimony. The Parliament Oak hotel development, multiple new hotel approvals elsewhere in NOTL, airport expansion plans, redevelopment of the Royal George Theatre and the

possibility of the hospital site being converted to a parking garage are frequently mentioned as examples of tourism reshaping the town to its detriment. More generically, these projects are often tied to demolition of historic buildings, the loss of a mature tree canopy, infrastructure strain and worsening traffic and parking problems. There is also considerable sensitivity to the densification of Glendale and the high-rises proposed there. While this isn't specifically tied to tourism, it is cited as another example of developer over-reach.

In essence, there is a widely held belief that Niagara-on-the-Lake is at a critical crossroad between preserving community character and accelerating over-development. In a sense, this is an existential inflection point for the Town. Members of the NOTLRA have an expectation that the association will provide the voice and clout the community needs to protect its interests in these tumultuous times. Indeed, for most, that was their rationale for joining the NOTLRA in the first place.

Among the specific concerns not directly associated with the above narrative, most deal with local expressions of larger-scale nationwide issues such as environmental degradation, growing storm water management needs and housing pressures. Of these, housing concerns are perhaps paramount, particularly in the context of affordability and the need for the growing seniors population to have access to effective housing options and other supports in the coming years.

The Reconfiguration of Local Government

As the analysis has demonstrated, the relationship that residents have with local government plays a large part in shaping their happiness with life in NOTL and their perspectives on its evolution. The Province of Ontario has recently introduced fundamental changes to the governance model for municipalities in the province, including Niagara-on-the-Lake. These changes offer the possibility of improving relations between residents and their elected representatives over time. Alternatively, they could also widen the rift that currently exists between them.

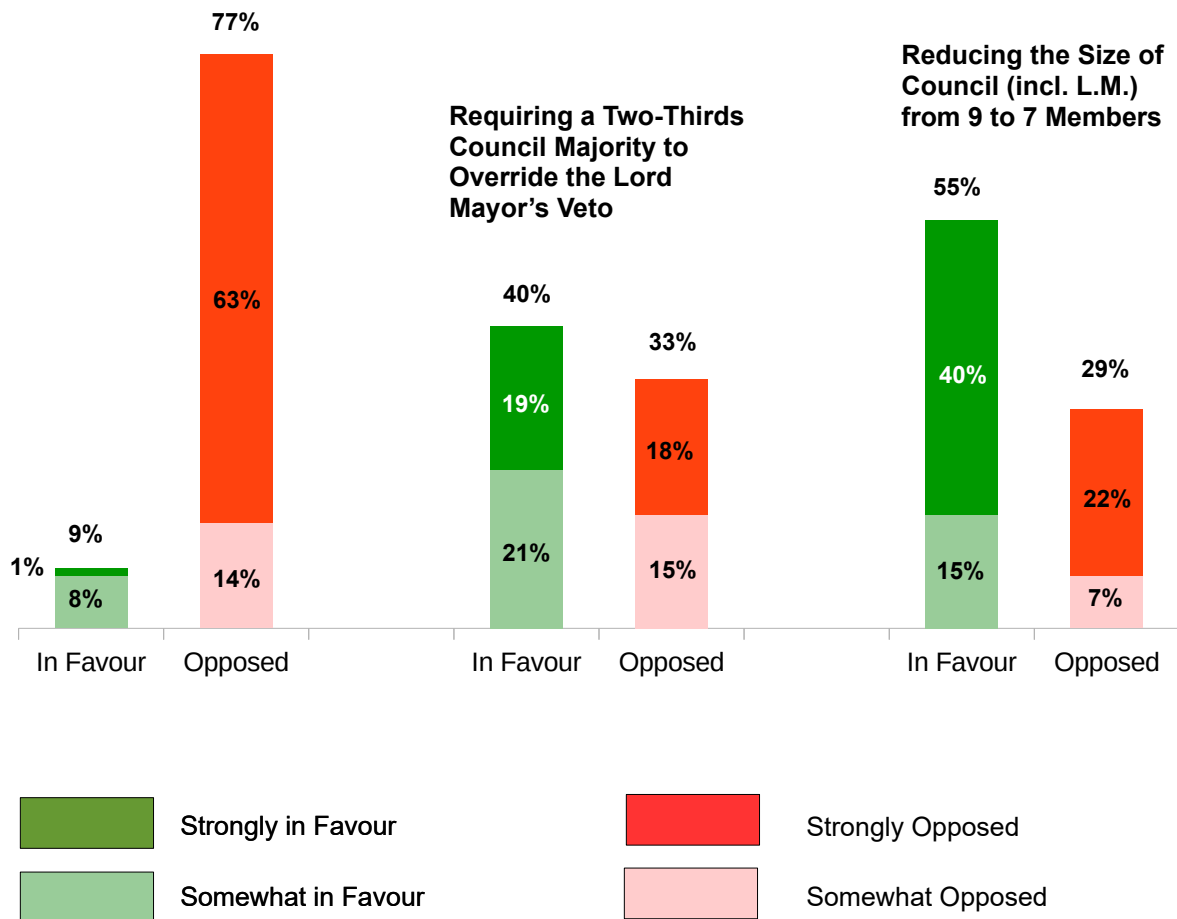
To better understand how this is likely to play out, survey respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they favoured or opposed each of the following three governance changes that have recently been introduced at the local level:

- The granting of “Strong Mayor” powers to the Lord Mayor, providing him or her with increased administrative and executive authority and the power to veto some decisions passed by a majority of councillors;
- The requirement of a two-thirds “super majority” for council to override the Lord Mayor’s veto;
- The reduction of council size from nine (the Lord mayor and eight councillors) to seven (the Lord Mayor and six councillors).

The following graphs present member reaction to each of these governance changes.

Approval/Disapproval of Changes to Local Governance Model

Granting “Strong Mayor” Powers to the Lord Mayor



Given that residents have strained relations with local government leadership at the present time, one would expect significant resistance to the notion of conferring “Strong Mayor” powers to the Lord Mayor. And, this is exactly what the survey unveils. Fully three-quarters of NOTLRA members oppose the decision to bring “Strong Mayor” powers to Niagara-on-the-Lake, with the majority (63%) voicing strong opposition to this idea. By contrast, just 9% are in favour, with a mere 1% expressing approval in strong terms.

This pattern of response leads us to the appropriate interpretation of member reaction to the constraints on “Strong Mayor” powers that are embedded in the legislation. Some are thankful that at least some constraints are in place, so are in favour of the requirement that a two-thirds “super majority” of councillors can override a mayoral veto. Others find this bar to be too high, undoubtedly because they believe that it violates core democratic principles.

Of some interest, there is no consensus on the reduction of the number of elected councillors from eight to six, dropping total council size from nine to seven when the Lord Mayor is factored in. There are fairly large camps on each side of this issue, with virtually equal numbers expressing their views strongly in opposition or support.

From these results, one can conclude that the conferring of “Strong Mayor” powers in today’s climate has more potential to further sour relations between council and residents rather than improve them. The mere possibility of these powers being exercised is an issue, and the way in which they are used will be closely scrutinized by residents who are anticipating the gulf between council decision-making and resident interests to widen. An intensified sense of alienation is a very real possibility.

As far as the reduction in council size goes, there is more willingness to let this play out to see where it leads. A fair number believe that there are benefits and that the reduction, in itself, won’t necessarily undermine effectiveness or responsiveness to citizens. However, there is a core group of residents who are highly skeptical and will likely respond quite negatively should the reduction prove problematic in any way, creating a ripple effect through the wider community.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NOTLRA

In responding to this survey, members have made their concerns and priorities clear and have also delivered a message to the NOTLRA with respect to the supportive role they see the organization playing. Put simply, there is an overwhelming desire to enlist the NOTLRA's aid in protecting and preserving the quality of life enjoyed by residents and providing them with a voice powerful enough and authoritative enough to be heard and respected.

It is worth underscoring the finding that members see the core focal point for the organization as preservation and protection first and foremost. Their conception of what needs to be preserved and protected is expansive and inclusive, going well beyond maintaining the physical structure and historic character of the Town's heritage districts. Their thinking extends to all aspects of life in NOTL that are critical to supporting the vibrancy and health of all of its diverse communities. This includes respecting its historical underpinnings and the physical manifestation of its heritage, but also embraces protection of the natural environment, preservation of NOTL's rural character and responsiveness to the pressures placed on the agricultural underpinnings of its economy and culture.

Members are also quite clear when it comes to identifying the sources of pressure they are currently grappling with. "Over-tourism" and the large-scale development projects that go with it are singled out with a remarkably high degree of consensus. Unrestricted tourism growth is thought to introduce direct pressures with respect to the development projects and the volumes of visitors it attracts as well as indirect pressures in terms of elevating tourism to the status of primacy in defining NOTL's reason for being. In the latter case, the sustainability of NOTL as place to live tends to be pushed aside, and infrastructure, housing priorities and supportive public services tend to be directed to its reconfiguration as a "tourism mecca". This establishes three focal points for ameliorative efforts:

- Thoroughly review and provide perspective on the obvious direct sources of accelerated growth pressure such as new hotels and other large-scale developments;
- Deal with the specific knock-on effects of accelerated growth on residential quality of life that generate significant and widespread concern among residents such as infrastructure deficiencies, storm water management concerns, general congestion and traffic issues, hollowing out of neighbourhoods, destruction of heritage buildings and ambiance, environmental degradation, pressure on rural character and potential loss of agricultural robustness;
- Recognize the longer-term indirect impact of pushing to the sideline investments that are critical to sustaining residential quality of life, but are not directly tied to tourism or economic growth more generally. Seniors supports, and accessible housing supply tailored to future community needs emerge as top priorities in this regard, with the availability of appropriate recreational infrastructure carrying some secondary weight in the younger resident cohorts.

In the eyes of NOTLRA members at least, the Town has reached a critical point in its development and there is some urgency for the NOTLRA step up in an effort to achieve better balance between economic growth and the preservation of residential quality of life. It is especially important to foster a cultural shift in thinking – toward a mindset that sees growth proceed in partnership with residents through

constructive dialogue, and away from a philosophy that pushes forward with growth at all costs in purposeful ignorance of resident concerns.

The feedback offered by members provides good direction on how the NOTLRA should position itself, the value of anchoring its mission to the concepts of protection and preservation and the most critical themes for focusing advocacy and action. However, nothing can be achieved in a vacuum. Members of the association certainly recognize this. Over the past several years there has evidently been a breakdown in communication and trust between residents and local government and, worse still, this has occurred during a period of marked volatility and transformation. Consequently, it can be argued that the most important action that the NOTLRA can undertake at the present time is to reestablish lines of communication and rebuild bridges to local council, the administrative apparatus and other entities that play a role in shaping the course of NOTL's development. A set of constructive relationships needs to be established with the NOTLRA acting as a critical facilitator and empathetic agent of change on behalf of the residential community.

Recent changes to the local governance model will undoubtedly make this task more challenging. It will also turn a more intense spotlight on the character traits that the NOTLRA should promote among those seeking public office. Nonetheless, success in the building of bridges to support constructive dialogue is absolutely essential.

Looking inward, it is also essential for the NOTLRA to continue building linkages to residents across a diversity of communities and to both enlarge and widen its membership base. Efforts to reach out to current non-members and appreciate their perspectives should continue to be undertaken, as should the challenge of encouraging membership through a convincing argument that a unified approach offers the prospect of more forcefully supporting the NOTL resident community in all of its diversity to the detriment of none.

