

September 8, 2025

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa & Town Council
Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake
1593 Four Mile Creek Road, P.O. Box 100
Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario L0S 1T0



Re: Feedback on the Official Plan Update Process: Chautauqua Secondary Plan

Dear Lord Mayor and Councillors,

On behalf of the Chautauqua Residents Association (CRA), I am writing to provide formal feedback on the ongoing Official Plan update process and to respond to the Lord Mayor's letter of August 12, 2025 letter to Chautauqua Residents Association members.

1. A Clear and Consistent Community Voice

For many years, residents of Chautauqua have spoken with one voice in favour of protecting the neighbourhood's unique character through a **Secondary Plan**. Our April 2025 submission detailed why Chautauqua is distinct within Old Town. Its radial street layout, modest cottage-scale homes, dense tree canopy, and absence of curbs or sidewalks are features that merit specific policy protection.

Public support for a Secondary Plan has been robust, consistent, and longstanding. The community has reinforced this through letters to the editor, public participation, and attendance at meetings. The Lake Report has covered this issue extensively, documenting residents' disappointment and frustration that the Town has chosen to remove the firm commitment once included in the draft Official Plan.

2. Disappointment in the Town's Reversal

The 2019 Draft Official Plan clearly committed to developing Secondary Plans for specific areas, explicitly including Chautauqua. In the most recent draft, however, this has been diluted to a vague suggestion that the neighbourhood *may be considered* for area-specific policies.

The difference between "will be developed" and "will be considered" is not semantic. It represents a shift from a clear obligation to a mere option. This reversal disregards years of resident engagement, undermines trust in the planning process, and fails to provide the certainty needed to protect one of Niagara on the Lake's most distinctive communities.

3. Risks without a Secondary Plan

As outlined in our April 2025 submission, Chautauqua faces increasing pressure from inappropriate development, the loss of mature trees, and the introduction of suburban design elements. Without a binding Secondary Plan or equivalent mechanism, the Town's commitment to preserving Chautauqua's heritage and character remains uncertain, leaving the neighbourhood vulnerable to irreversible changes. While the Lord Mayor's letter speaks of "tools that are intended to ensure" that

future development aligns with objectives, our understanding is that only a Secondary Plan is binding on the Ontario Land Tribunal and can ensure that this will occur.

We are concerned by the statement in the Lord Mayor's letter that Staff will be determining the best method to protect each neighbourhood. Our view is that a determination as serious as this should be made by our elected representatives, who are accountable to the electorate, and should not be delegated. Our view is supported by section 23.3(1)5 of the *Municipal Act*, which provides that a municipality may not delegate to its staff the power to adopt an official plan or an amendment to an official plan under the *Planning Act*. The principle from the legislation is very clear – Council should not be allowing Staff to decide what goes in the Official Plan.

We are also concerned about giving decision-making power to Staff because, in recent Committee of Adjustment cases, Staff have demonstrated a very different opinion from Chautauqua residents on the character and streetscape of the Chautauqua neighbourhood. Having Council make the final decision after hearing directly from residents is the necessary solution.

4. Request for Council Action

We respectfully but firmly request that Town Council:

- Reinstatement the commitment that a **Secondary Plan for Chautauqua *will be developed*** as part of the 2025 Official Plan
- Ensure that this plan addresses contextual design, tree protection, preservation of streetscape, reinforcement of residential character, and environmental stewardship
- Provide a transparent explanation of why the previous commitment was removed despite overwhelming resident support
- Lastly, we firmly request that Council make its own determination on whether a Secondary Plan requirement for Chautauqua will be included in the new Official Plan

5. Closing

The residents of Chautauqua remain committed partners in shaping the future of Niagara-on-the-Lake. We wish to collaborate with Council to ensure that the Official Plan reflects both the Town's stated values and the community's long-expressed priorities.

We urge Council to honour its past commitments, listen to the voices of residents, and take the necessary steps to secure Chautauqua's future as a cherished and distinctive neighbourhood.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Weston Miller', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Weston Miller
President, Chautauqua Residents Association