

Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association

Position on Municipal Restructuring in Niagara

The question for Niagara-on-the-Lake residents is whether structural changes to regional governance could eventually produce higher property taxes locally.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association (NOTLRA) believes that before any municipal restructuring occurs, residents deserve clear evidence demonstrating that such changes would reduce rather than redistribute municipal costs.

1. Infrastructure and Asset Management Pressures

A principal fiscal motivation for the City of Niagara Falls to pursue a merger with Niagara-on-the-Lake would be access to Niagara-on-the-Lake's stronger property tax base. Niagara Falls manages municipal infrastructure with a replacement value of approximately \$2.7 billion, compared with roughly \$1.07 billion in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Niagara Falls also has roughly 94,000 residents and receives millions of tourists annually. These visitors place added pressure on roads, parks, policing, and municipal infrastructure beyond the demands created by the resident population.

Combining municipalities would broaden the tax base available to fund these obligations but would place upward pressure on property taxes in Niagara-on-the-Lake as its residents begin contributing to infrastructure obligations generated primarily within the larger urban municipality.

2. Property Tax Base and Fiscal Contribution

Niagara-on-the-Lake has one of the strongest property assessment bases per resident in the Niagara Region due to high property values and tourism-related investment. As a result, the municipality contributes disproportionately to regional taxation relative to its population size and service demand.

Municipalities with stronger assessment bases can become net contributors to regional services even when they generate lower service demand. Niagara-on-the-Lake residents therefore risk subsidizing infrastructure, policing, and operating costs generated primarily within larger urban municipalities.

3. Governance Reform Proposal and Weighted Voting

Recent proposals suggest restructuring Niagara's Regional Council into a mayoral table consisting of the twelve municipal mayors plus the Regional Chair, combined with population-weighted voting.

While this proposal does not formally amalgamate municipalities, the practical effect would be to concentrate decision-making authority in the largest municipalities. Population-weighted voting risks creating the functional equivalent of amalgamation through voting power rather than through legislative restructuring. We believe that this proposed recommendation is un-democratic and must be rejected at the outset.

No other two-tier regional municipality in Ontario distributes voting authority in this manner. Ontario regions normally balance representation by population with municipal representation by assigning more councillors to larger municipalities while supporting one vote per elected representative.

4. Mathematical Weakness in Weighted Voting

The proposed weighted voting structure introduces representational distortions. Voting power would be distributed in population increments rather than through proportional representation. Municipalities just above or below a population threshold could receive materially different voting authority despite having similar populations.

More importantly, the proposal consolidates multiple votes in the hands of a single mayor rather than distributing representation among multiple elected councillors. This concentrates political authority rather than distributing it among elected representatives, increasing the potential for a small number of large municipalities to dominate regional decisions.

5. Policing Cost Allocation

Staff compensation represents one of the largest components of municipal operating budgets, and policing is typically the single largest operating expense funded through regional taxation.

Niagara policing is delivered through the Niagara Regional Police Service and funded through the regional tax levy based on property assessment rather than policing demand. This can result in municipalities with strong tax bases but low policing demand becoming net contributors, as is the case for Niagara-on-the-Lake, to the policing budget.

A hybrid allocation model similar to the Ontario Provincial Police municipal contracts combining baseline service costs with demand-based costs would better align policing expenses with where policing demand occurs.

6. Prior Provincial Review and Transparency

In 2019 the Province of Ontario commissioned a regional governance review led by former Regional Chairs Ken Seiling and Michael Fenn. The review included extensive consultation with municipalities, organizations, and residents throughout Niagara.

A report was prepared following this work but has never been publicly released. If governance reform is again being considered, the earlier provincial review should be disclosed before any structural changes proceed.

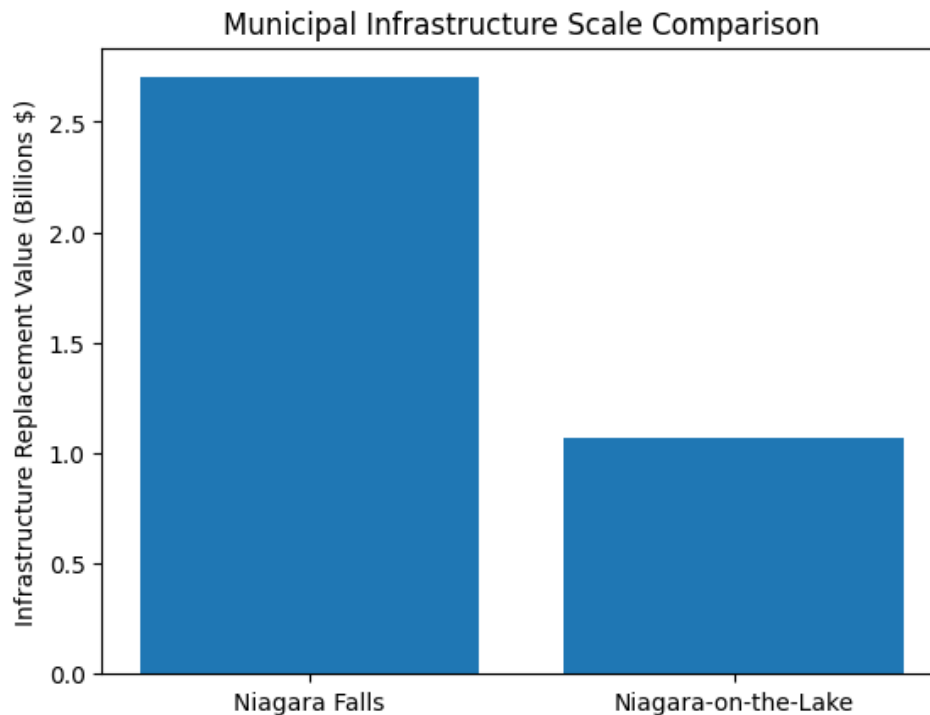
Public policy should build upon prior analysis, not bypass it.

7. Conclusion

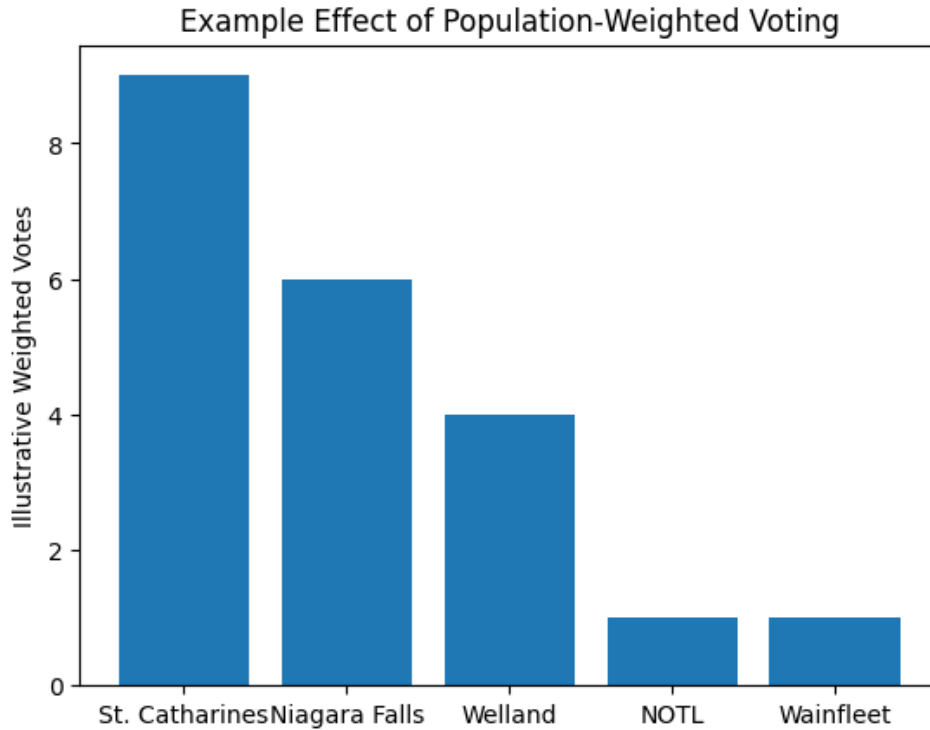
The Ontario experience demonstrates that municipal amalgamation rarely produces sustained cost savings and often redistributes financial obligations between municipalities. Governance reforms that concentrate authority through population-weighted voting risk producing similar outcomes without formal consolidation.

Before altering Niagara's municipal structure, the region should address underlying cost drivers including infrastructure funding and policing allocation through transparent, independently verified financial analysis.

Infrastructure Comparison



Illustrative Effect of Weighted Voting



The following resolutions have been approved by the NOTLRA Board

Resolution 1 – Make public the 2019 Fenn-Seiling report

Be it resolved that all municipal councils in the Niagara Region, demand that the **2019 Fenn-Seiling** report be made public so that it can be used as the starting point in the 2026 discussion on improving services for the residents of the Niagara region.

APPROVED March 6, 2026

Resolution 2 - Rejection of Municipal Amalgamation

Be it resolved that the Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association reject the notion of municipal amalgamation involving Niagara-on-the-Lake on the grounds that it risks redistributing infrastructure and service costs without unmistakable evidence of financial benefit to residents.

APPROVED March 6, 2026

Resolution 3 - Opposition to Weighted Voting Governance Model #

Be it resolved that the Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association oppose the proposal to restructure Niagara Regional Council into a mayors-only body with population-weighted

voting, as such a structure concentrates political power and is inconsistent with democratic representation traditions in Ontario's municipal governance system.

APPROVED March 6, 2026

Resolution 4 - Inter-Municipal Residents' Coalition

Be it resolved that the Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association seek to work collaboratively with residents' associations and civic organizations across other municipalities in the Niagara Region to advocate for transparent fiscal analysis and to oppose governance reforms that may disadvantage smaller municipalities.

What is the proposed weighted governance model that is being proposed by Bob Dale that the NOTLRA does not support?

<https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-m&q=what%20is%20the%20weighted%20goveernance%20model%20being%20proposed%20in%20the%20Niagara%20region>