

Governance, Finance & Civic Engagement Committee

Strengthening accountability, transparency, and participation

Date: Friday, February 13, 2026

Time: 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Location: Community Centre – Boardroom

Interim Chair: Stuart McCormack

AGENDA

1. Call to Order

Confirmation of quorum.

2. Municipal Election 2026 – Timeline Awareness (Countdown)

As of February 13, 2026:

- Nomination period opens: May 1, 2026
(approximately 77 days remaining)
- Nomination period closes: Friday, August 21, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.
(approximately 190 days remaining)
- Municipal Election Day: Monday, October 26, 2026

(approximately 256 days remaining)

3. Chair's Opening Remarks

4. Committee Leadership

Discussion and decision regarding:

- Appointment or election of a Committee Chair
- Appointment or election of a Vice Chair
- Continuity of leadership during the Interim Chair's absence

Suggested Motion:

That the Governance, Finance & Civic Engagement Committee appoint or elect a Chair and Vice Chair from among its members, effective immediately, and confirm leadership continuity during the Interim Chair's absence.

5. Committee Workstreams – Confirmation

Confirmation of active workstreams for 2026:

- Governance, procedural fairness, and accountability
 - Municipal finance, infrastructure, and lifecycle risk
 - Civic engagement and municipal election readiness
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6. Municipal Elections 2026 – Governance Readiness

Discussion of the committee's non-partisan role in:

- Governance literacy and candidate readiness
 - Candidate outreach (non-partisan)
 - Use of publicly available information only
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7. Top 5 Issues and Election Candidate Toolkit

(Substantive agenda item)

Review and discussion of:

- Consolidated Top Five Issues raised by residents
- Governance, procedural fairness, enforcement, and institutional-risk themes
- Open-ended candidate questionnaire
- Internal evaluation rubric

(See Attachment A)

8. Committee Meeting Schedule & Continuity

Discussion regarding:

- Establishing a regular meeting schedule
- Meeting continuity during the Interim Chair's absence

Suggested Motion:

That the Governance, Finance & Civic Engagement Committee establish a regular meeting schedule for the balance of 2026 and confirm that meetings will continue during the Interim Chair’s absence under the direction of the appointed Chair.

9. Next Meeting

Confirmation of date, time, and anticipated agenda items.

10. Adjournment

ATTACHMENT A

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ATTACHMENT A

Top 5 Issues and Election Candidate Toolkit

Governance, Finance & Civic Engagement Committee

Municipality: [Niagara-on-the-Lake](#)

A. PURPOSE OF THIS TOOLKIT

This Toolkit consolidates recurring issues raised by residents and provides a structured, non-partisan framework to support assessment of municipal election candidates' governance readiness.

This document:

- Does not endorse candidates or policies;
- Does not assess political ideology;
- Focuses on process, judgment, statutory awareness, and risk stewardship;
- Is suitable for public circulation and internal committee use.

The Toolkit is grounded in publicly observable governance considerations and is intended to promote informed civic engagement.

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B. CONFIRMED TOP FIVE ISSUES RAISED BY RESIDENTS

The following five issues emerged most consistently across multiple independent resident submissions and structured inputs reviewed by the Committee.

1. Governance, Procedural Fairness & Accountability

Residents raised concerns regarding:

- Inconsistent application of council and committee procedures;
- Late agenda changes that limit review or public input;
- Procedural bylaws that are unclear or inconsistently applied;
- Transparency and perceived conflicts of interest involving elected officials, staff, or external advisors;
- Inconsistent enforcement of existing bylaws and approval conditions;
- Insufficient documentation of decision rationale;
- Changes to advisory committee mandates affecting community participation.

Governance relevance:

Procedural inconsistency and weak documentation increase institutional risk, reduce public confidence, and may expose the municipality to procedural challenges.

2. Planning, Growth Management & Precedent-Setting Decisions

Residents raised concerns regarding:

- Limited proactive planning for new and infill development;
- Oversight of major development applications;
- Precedent-setting planning approvals affecting heritage and environmental protections;
- Cumulative impacts of density and intensification;
- Reduced municipal discretion following legislated “complete application” requirements;
- Risks associated with transitions to new planning frameworks.

Governance relevance:

Once established, planning precedents constrain future councils and shape long-term land-use outcomes.

3. Infrastructure, Municipal Services & Lifecycle Financial Risk

Residents identified concerns regarding:

- Stormwater, roads, transit, and policing visibility;
- Deferred maintenance and infrastructure backlogs;
- Lifecycle costing and long-term operating exposure;
- Property taxes and value for money;
- Distribution of infrastructure and operating costs among residents, agriculture, and tourism;
- Environmental and fiscal impacts of growth-related infrastructure;
- Equity in regional service delivery relative to tax contribution.

Governance relevance:

Infrastructure decisions create long-tail financial obligations that extend beyond a single council term.

4. Tourism, External Pressure & Economic Balance

Residents raised concerns regarding:

- Tourism-oriented policy emphasis and MAT impacts;
- Alignment between tourism revenues and municipal costs;
- External initiatives influencing local priorities;
- Need for sustainable tourism management (social, environmental, and economic);
- Reliance on limited economic sectors and need for diversification.

Governance relevance:

Revenue volatility and cost externalization can distort municipal decision-making if not actively managed.

5. Strategic Autonomy, Leadership Stability & Long-Term Vision

Residents identified concerns regarding:

- Implications of expanded mayoral authority;
- Senior leadership turnover;
- Institutional continuity and administrative stability;
- Municipal autonomy within regional governance structures;
- Delays in Official Plan implementation;
- Absence of a clearly articulated long-term growth vision.

Governance relevance:

Leadership instability and unclear strategic direction increase governance and financial risk.

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C. CANDIDATE GOVERNANCE & READINESS QUESTIONNAIRE

(Open-ended responses required)

1. Governance, Procedural Fairness & Accountability

1. How do you understand council's responsibility to ensure consistent procedural fairness?
 2. How should council balance efficiency with meaningful debate and public input?
 3. How would you respond to inconsistent application of procedures or bylaws?
 4. How should council address transparency and perceived conflicts of interest?
 5. How should council document decisions to support accountability?
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2. Planning, Growth Management & Precedent

1. How do you understand council's role once an application is deemed complete under Ontario law?
 2. How should council evaluate residual risk associated with professionally stamped submissions?
 3. How should council guard against harmful precedent-setting approvals?
 4. How would you assess cumulative growth impacts?
 5. How should council balance compliance with long-term community outcomes?
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3. Infrastructure, Services & Financial Risk

1. How do you assess infrastructure funding adequacy?
 2. How should lifecycle costing influence approvals and budgets?
 3. How should costs be allocated among stakeholders?
 4. How would you evaluate service levels relative to taxation?
 5. How should council approach deferred maintenance risk?
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4. Tourism, External Pressure & Economic Balance

1. How should council assess net resident benefit from tourism initiatives?
2. How do you understand MAT revenues relative to costs?

3. How should council respond to external growth initiatives?
 4. What does sustainable tourism management mean in practice?
 5. How should council pursue economic diversification?
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5. Strategic Autonomy, Leadership & Vision

1. How do you understand expanded mayoral authority within council governance?
2. How should council manage leadership transition risk?
3. How should municipal autonomy be protected within regional structures?
4. What role should the Official Plan play in long-term outcomes?
5. How would you promote institutional continuity?

Closing Question:

What do you believe is the greatest governance risk facing the municipality over the next council term, and why?

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D. INTERNAL EVALUATION FRAMEWORK (COMMITTEE USE)

Scoring Scale

- 5 – Election-Ready
- 4 – Competent
- 3 – Adequate
- 2 – Weak
- 1 – Concerning

Evaluation Dimensions

- Specificity and clarity

- Risk literacy (financial, legal, governance)
- Statutory awareness
- Consistency across issues
- Ability to explain complexity plainly

Common Governance Red Flags

- Treating professional stamps as liability transfer
 - Confusing procedural completeness with substantive approval
 - Ignoring lifecycle or cumulative impacts
 - Dismissing public engagement
 - Uncritical reliance on advice without scrutiny
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E. APPLICATION TO REAL COUNCIL DECISIONS

Candidate responses may be assessed against foreseeable decision contexts, including:

- Major development approvals
- Infrastructure and stormwater investment
- Strategic land-use decisions
- Tourism funding and MAT allocation
- Governance practices under expanded mayoral authority

Assessment focus:

Do the responses demonstrate capacity to reduce institutional risk and support durable governance?