



August 17, 2023

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa and Council
Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake
1593 Four Mile Creek Road
PO Box 100
Virgil, Ontario
L0S 1T0

Re: Parliament Oak & the Urban Design Committee: Land Use, not Design, is the Main Point

Dear Lord Mayor and Council:

The Niagara Foundation has closely followed the Zoning By-law and Official Plan amendment requests for 325 King Street (the former Parliament Oak school site) by Two Sisters Resorts Corp. Our concerns over timing and process, which extend back to the previous owner's development attempts, remain. However, let there be no lack of certainty that the main issue at hand, and what should be first and foremost on everyone's mind with respect to this property, is land use.

During its June 28, 2023 meeting, the Urban Design Committee recommended that Council reject the Zoning By-law and Official Plan amendments for 325 King Street (along with several related recommendations including more clearly establishing commercial areas, conducting additional studies and clarifying "completeness" of applications). At the July 25th Council meeting, the recommendations contained in the Urban Design Committee's report were rejected. The rejection was due, at least in part, to a belief that the Committee's recommendations were outside the scope of its Terms of Reference.

Without debating the question of Scope (though we note the Committee's Terms of Reference state, in part, that "The Committee may also provide input on policy and guidelines for specific sites and projects, as well as to define areas that should be resolved."), the Foundation believes the attention being paid to procedural aspects of this issue, misses the main point, specifically: ***What is Council's plan for this prominent town block zoned "Open Space & Community Facilities" in both the new and previous Official Plans?"***

Along with the former hospital site, Parliament Oak is one of the few remaining Old Town sites capable of providing critical services needed in a balanced and growing community such as ours. We already have a lopsided preponderance of hotel rooms relative to community services, especially for seniors and the young. Where is this Council's leadership and direction to staff on strategic land use? So much of our community lands have already been lost in "one-off" decisions, some regrettable with time.

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We believe it is the obligation of Town staff and Council to use community lands/space to support community needs. As an example, several local organizations have come forward recently, pledging to carry out their missions at Parliament Oak, the former hospital site and/or other locations within NOTL. Don't we owe these organizations, and the residents they serve, due consideration before more community use land is removed from our growing town?

We believe Council needs to take charge of this situation and set direction. A change of use to 325 King Street will be a precedent-setting decision. Such a change is one that needs to be made by Council, not Town staff, using the best information available and taking advice from all established input mechanisms at Council's disposal, including that of the Urban Design Committee. And, as we've pointed out to Council in the past, decisions of this magnitude need to be made within a broader planning context not on a project-by-project or site-by-site basis.

Therefore, the Foundation asks:

- Why did Town staff ask the Urban Design Committee to comment on details of the building proposed for 325 King, before the requested Official Plan and zoning amendments had been decided? This request likely created the difficult position in which the UDC was placed.
- Will Council provide direction to staff on its strategic posture with regards to the preservation of the remaining lands zoned for community use (including 325 King St and the Old Hospital site)? This critically needed thought leadership would enable our growing community to benefit from a longer-term vision where lands are used to provide community services for which demand will only grow.

The Foundation believes **the** fundamental starting point in this situation is land use. Blurring the focus by deflecting discussion to design details diminishes the importance of the subject matter. The question is not about three or four stories or how large the banquet areas should be. Rather, what does Council want for this important piece of property in central Old Town?

The Niagara Foundation urges Council to take control of this important decision by ensuring decisions are made in the correct order and with the best available information.

Yours very truly,

The Niagara Foundation



Lyle Hall, Chair