



April 14, 2025

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa and Town Council
Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake
1593 Four Mile Creek Road
P.O. Box 100
Virgil, Ontario
L0S 1J0

Update of the Adopted (2019) Official Plan

Dear Lord Mayor Zalepa and Council:

We are writing to provide comments and input on the Town's review of its adopted (2019) Official Plan, ultimately leading to the introduction of a new Official Plan by the end of 2025. Established in 1962, The Niagara Foundation — a registered charity with a voluntary Board — helps to champion and safeguard the architectural, cultural and environmental integrity of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

To provide input on the adopted (2019) Official Plan, the Board of the Foundation held a half-day workshop last week, prior to and during which we engaged professional planning expertise. Based on this input and our review we support the general direction of the Official Plan as drafted. We believe that it strikes an appropriate balance that allows growth and change including, for example, intensification areas, while at the same time conserving the character and heritage resources of each settlement area comprising Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Our review included a detailed analysis of the policies for intensification, the maintenance of character in all five important settlement villages, given their unique heritage contexts, and the process to ensure heritage values can co-exist with anticipated growth. To this end, we believe the new Official Plan should contain more detail on intensification (e.g., where, how much, nature of growth) as well as more clearly outline a desire (and approach) to preserve the character of our most vulnerable areas (e.g., the Old Town, Queenston, St. Davids).

We commend Council for the policies supporting the preparation of Secondary Plans for the Old Town (including Chautauqua) and Virgil. The Secondary Plan process should be one that involves residents in determining the future of their communities as well as creating an understanding of and commitment to managing change. We hope this will be a priority of Council following approval of the Official Plan.

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Ontario, L0S 1J0

We also wanted to point out the focus on cultural heritage in the Region of Niagara Official Plan. Section 6.5 (Cultural Heritage) speaks to the need to conserve cultural heritage and to designate properties (and wider, more encompassing conservation areas) to ensure such assets are retained. Reinforcing the value of cultural heritage to achieving broader economic prosperity goals, Section 4.5 (Economic Prosperity) notes the need to conserve “significant cultural heritage resources to foster a sense of place”. We completely agree with this regional focus and trust this regional direction will be reflected in the Town’s Official Plan

Development and preservation are not mutually exclusive, and we approached our input into the Official Plan review process with that perspective. However, the Foundation has previously expressed our concerns over the increasingly common practice of “zoning by exception” (i.e., the consideration of both zoning and Official Plan amendments on a site-by-site/project-by-project basis). We believe this process diminishes the integrity of our planning documents and processes. A new and fresh Official Plan should provide direction for the future and establish the nature and location of change that is anticipated. If, for example, the Town wishes to extend the commercial areas of Queen, King or Mary Streets, these changes should be enabled in the new Official Plan rather than as the result of a developer’s efforts on a particular property and/or the Town’s reluctance to argue the matter in front of the Ontario Land Tribunal.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our position. We wish to remain involved in this process and request the ability to review and comment on proposed changes to the adopted (2019) plan prior to submission to Council.

Yours very truly,

The Niagara Foundation



Lyle Hall, Chair

The Niagara Foundation
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cc: Ms. Kirsten McCauley, Director of Community & Development Services
Mr. Steve Burke, Manager of Policy Planning and Heritage