

Question 1 — Strong mayor powers

Question asked:

The new Lord Mayor will have strong mayor powers permitting the Lord Mayor, in certain circumstances, to override Council decisions, hire and dismiss senior staff, and control development of the municipal budget. Are there instances in which you would consider using these powers? If so, when and why?

Erwin Wiens

Summary of response

- Described strong mayor powers as a tool provided by the Province that the municipality cannot return.
- Said the powers can work in certain situations.
- Pointed to the most recent municipal budget process as a successful example, saying it saved more than \$200,000, reduced staff time and permitted earlier infrastructure tenders.
- Said authority over staffing should continue to be delegated to the CAO.
- Emphasized democracy, consensus-building and respecting Council decisions.
- Said he could not recall a Council decision during the previous eight years for which he would have considered using strong mayor powers.
- Referred to one previous occasion when their use was considered but said he chose not to support using them.

*Did the candidate answer the question? Partially

Assessment: Wiens identified the municipal budget as an example of where strong mayor powers can be useful and explained why. He also indicated that staffing authority should remain with the CAO. However, he did not clearly establish the circumstances or threshold under which he personally would use strong mayor powers in the future. He did not directly say whether he would ever use them to override a Council decision.

Vaughan Goettler

Summary of response

- Said he would not use strong mayor powers.
- Characterized the powers as fundamentally inconsistent with grassroots democracy.
- Argued that effective leadership depends on consensus-building rather than unilateral authority.
- Used Lester Pearson's minority governments as an example of accomplishing significant objectives through cooperation.
- Drew on his business experience to argue that large organizations should not be run dictatorially.
- Described strong mayor powers as extreme and unnecessary.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Goettler gave a direct and categorical answer: he would not use strong mayor powers. Because his answer was no, he was not required to identify circumstances in which he would use them. He also clearly explained his reasons, principally democracy and consensus-building.

Andrea Kaiser

Summary of response

- Said she had researched why strong mayor powers were introduced.
- Explained that the powers were intended to support housing construction and related infrastructure, including transit, roads, utilities and services.
- Identified the municipal budget process as an area in which the powers could provide value.
- Compared this with the lengthy budget process at Niagara Regional Council.
- Emphasized that her leadership style is collaborative.
- Said she would not use strong mayor powers without consulting and working with Council.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Partially**

Assessment: Kaiser identified the budget process as a possible circumstance in which the powers could be useful and said collaboration with Council would be a condition of their use. However, she did not clearly say whether she would actually invoke the powers or define the circumstances that would justify doing so. She also did not address whether she would use them to override a Council decision or exercise the senior-staff powers.

Question 2 — Relationships with developers and conflicts of interest

Question asked:

Transparency and open decision-making are priorities of residents. Do you have any business, financial or family relationships with developers who may submit proposals to Niagara-on-the-Lake Council? If so, can you state those relationships and whether you will declare a conflict of interest when a proposal proceeds to Council?

Vaughan Goettler

Summary of response

- Answered no.

- Said he had been fortunate in his business life and was not financially beholden even to a bank.
- Stated that he was free of anything that would conflict with his responsibilities as Lord Mayor.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Goettler directly denied having any relevant business, financial or family relationships. Because his answer was no, the conditional questions about identifying those relationships and declaring a conflict did not arise.

Andrea Kaiser

Summary of response

- Said she would declare, and had previously declared, conflicts when required.
- Disclosed that she had worked for a local business that had operated in the community for more than 30 years.
- Said she would not characterize that business as a developer.
- Referred to an occasion during her previous municipal service when she declared a conflict concerning that business.
- Committed to complying with the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act and the Town's Code of Conduct.
- Said potential conflicts would have to be examined individually, including whether an interest was direct or indirect.
- Promised to be open and transparent about any conflicts.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Partially**

Assessment: Kaiser addressed how she would handle conflicts and disclosed a general connection with a local business. However, she did not identify the business or clearly explain the nature of her relationship with it. She also did not provide a direct yes-or-no answer covering all business, financial and family relationships with developers who might appear before Council.

Erwin Wiens

Summary of response

- Said conflict-of-interest requirements are established by legislation.
- Referred to the Integrity Commissioner as an arm's-length adviser to Council.
- Said he had followed the applicable rules during his previous eight years in office.
- Committed to continuing to follow the legislation.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Partially**

Assessment: Wiens explained that he would follow conflict-of-interest legislation, but he did not answer the principal disclosure question: whether he has any business, financial or family relationships with developers who may submit proposals to Council. He also did not identify any such relationships or expressly state that none exist.

Question 3 — Municipal taxes

Question asked:

Municipal taxes have increased approximately 22% over the past four years, or more than 5% annually. Do you believe those increases were fair and reasonable, and what would your quantifiable goal be for tax increases or decreases over the next four years?

Andrea Kaiser

Summary of response

- Said Niagara-on-the-Lake has the lowest municipal tax rate in the Niagara Region.
- Explained that comparisons with larger municipalities are difficult because they have greater density and commercial tax revenue.
- Attributed a significant portion of the tax burden to regional levies and Niagara-on-the-Lake's comparatively high property assessments.
- Identified regional policing costs as an example, saying Niagara-on-the-Lake households pay substantially more than households in other municipalities.
- Said provincial funding shortfalls and downloaded costs also contribute to regional tax increases.
- Committed to seeking efficiencies at the municipal level.
- Said the larger issue was ensuring that Niagara-on-the-Lake does not pay more than its fair share of regional costs.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Partially**

Assessment: Kaiser explained the broader reasons for Niagara-on-the-Lake's tax burden and identified areas in which she would seek change. However, she did not directly state whether the previous increases were fair and reasonable. She also did not provide a numerical or otherwise measurable goal for tax increases or decreases over the next four years.

Erwin Wiens

Summary of response

- Said taxes should be considered in dollars as well as percentages.
- Stated that Niagara-on-the-Lake has the lowest property tax rate among Niagara municipalities.
- Said the four-year increase amounted to approximately \$350, or about one dollar per day, for the average resident on the same assessment basis.

- Emphasized that approximately 65% of the tax bill goes to the Region and approximately 25% goes to policing.
- Said his objective was to keep taxes stable and spending accountable while maintaining essential services.
- Promised to seek efficiencies before asking residents to spend additional money.
- Emphasized the importance of understanding and scrutinizing municipal and regional budgets.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Partially**

Assessment: Wiens provided context for the past increases and stated a general objective of stable taxes and accountable spending. However, he did not clearly say whether the previous increases were fair and reasonable. “Keeping taxes stable” was not expressed as a numerical ceiling, percentage, range or other quantifiable four-year goal.

Vaughan Goettler

Summary of response

- Said Niagara-on-the-Lake was not receiving appropriate representation or adequate services for the regional taxes residents pay.
- Linked municipal costs to legal settlements involving developers.
- Argued that stronger adherence to the Official Plan and municipal bylaws would reduce development disputes and legal expenses.
- Said taxes were too high.
- Set a goal of limiting future tax increases to no more than the rate of inflation.
- Acknowledged that he could not guarantee that result before taking office but committed to working toward it.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Goettler directly stated that taxes were too high, thereby addressing whether the previous increases were reasonable. He also provided a measurable future objective: tax increases should not exceed inflation. His qualification that he could not guarantee the result did not prevent him from answering the question.

Question 4 — Openness in Council and Town staff decision-making

Question asked:

Recent surveys undertaken by the Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association suggest that taxpayers are concerned about a lack of openness in Council and Town staff decision-making. How would you address this concern?

Erwin Wiens

Summary of response

- Acknowledged that residents' concerns about access to information are legitimate.
- Said municipalities have extensive statutory transparency obligations.
- Noted that municipal budgets, construction information, meeting notices and other materials are available online.
- Referred to the Town's "Open Book" program as a source of information about ongoing projects.
- Proposed determining precisely what information residents believe they are not receiving.
- Said residents should be directed to where the information can be found.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Partially**

Assessment: Wiens proposed identifying residents' specific information concerns and helping them access information already available. However, his response largely defended existing disclosure practices. He did not identify concrete changes to make Council and staff decision-making itself more open, such as earlier consultation, clearer staff reports, fuller explanations of decisions or improved disclosure concerning closed meetings.

Vaughan Goettler

Summary of response

- Said the municipal budget should be presented in a form that ordinary residents can understand.
- Criticized financial reporting involving approximately 200 subsidiary accounts.
- Proposed publishing an income statement and balance sheet quarterly.
- Said residents should not have to wait until six months after year-end to receive financial results.
- Proposed publishing the information in the newspaper.
- Said assistance should be available to residents who require explanations.
- Defined transparency as having no secrets or concealed information.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Partially**

Assessment: Goettler provided concrete proposals for improving financial transparency. However, the question concerned openness in Council and Town staff decision-making generally. He did not address non-financial matters such as public consultation, access to staff recommendations, closed-session practices or explanations of Council decisions.

Andrea Kaiser

Summary of response

- Said residents want to understand how decisions are made and to be consulted meaningfully before important decisions are taken.
- Said residents also want assurance that their elected representatives are listening.
- Referred to her earlier work establishing an additional public planning information meeting before staff reports were completed.
- Said elected representatives should hear residents, fellow councillors and any new information before deciding how to vote.
- Committed to explaining how she reached important decisions after voting.
- Said residents may accept an unfavourable outcome more readily when they know they were heard and understand the reasons for the decision.
- Identified public trust as the central objective.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Kaiser directly addressed the concern and proposed identifiable measures: earlier public consultation, listening before decisions are made and publicly explaining the reasons for votes. Her response covered openness in the decision-making process rather than merely the availability of documents.

Question 5 — Stormwater, wastewater treatment and drainage systems

Question asked:

Do you believe there is a problem with Niagara-on-the-Lake's stormwater, wastewater-treatment and drainage systems? If so, what specific actions would you undertake to address the issue?

Vaughan Goettler

Summary of response

- Answered yes.
- Proposed an immediate moratorium on new development until the Town understands the condition and capacity of its infrastructure.
- Referred to repeated sewage flooding experienced by a St. Davids resident.
- Proposed a Town-supported program to install backwater valves to prevent sewage from entering homes.
- Said drainage ditches are not being cleaned adequately and some culverts are undersized.
- Called for a comprehensive drainage and infrastructure program.
- Proposed restoring or using agricultural and irrigation committees to obtain local expertise.
- Argued that the Town should rely more heavily on knowledgeable residents and less on outside consultants.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Goettler directly acknowledged the problem and proposed several specific actions: suspending development temporarily, assessing infrastructure capacity, supporting backwater valves, cleaning ditches, addressing undersized culverts and using local advisory committees.

Andrea Kaiser

Summary of response

- Said demonstrated infrastructure capacity and readiness should be prerequisites for significant development.
- Pointed to the Official Plan as the principal tool for coordinating development with roads, water mains, sewers, parks and other infrastructure.
- Opposed a general development moratorium because it could lead to expensive litigation.
- Proposed using secondary plans and the forthcoming comprehensive zoning bylaw to establish legally enforceable development controls.
- Said municipal policies must ensure that development does not place excessive pressure on existing infrastructure.
- Called for capital-budget investment in infrastructure maintenance and improvements.
- Identified climate resilience as a priority because extreme storms are occurring more frequently.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Kaiser acknowledged infrastructure-capacity and climate-resilience problems and identified specific responses through planning policies, updated zoning, secondary plans and capital investment. Although she did not propose immediate operational measures such as ditch cleaning or backwater valves, she answered the question with a defined policy and funding approach.

Erwin Wiens

Summary of response

- Explained that earlier decisions favoured brushing drainage ditches rather than clearing them completely, based on the environmental and climate information then available.
- Said recent storms demonstrated that a different approach is now required.
- Warned that a development moratorium or interim-control bylaw could be overturned through litigation.
- Said provincial growth requirements limit the Town's ability to stop development.
- Identified the Official Plan and updated comprehensive zoning bylaw as tools for controlling growth and infrastructure demands.
- Said the wastewater-treatment plant has available capacity.
- Acknowledged problems with the St. Davids pumping station and said temporary repairs had been made while further work continued.

- Referred to the Town’s asset-management plan, which evaluates approximately 30,000 municipal assets and identifies their condition, repair costs and maintenance requirements.
- Said the asset-management plan would guide infrastructure funding over the next ten years.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Wiens identified specific drainage and pumping-station problems and described changes in ditch maintenance, temporary repairs, updated planning controls and the ten-year asset-management plan. He also distinguished those problems from the wastewater-treatment plant, which he said has sufficient capacity.

Question 6 — Criteria for assessing proposed development

Question asked:

Residents have raised serious concerns about the Town’s adherence to the Official Plan, zoning and bylaws when considering proposals by developers. Please name the three most important criteria you would apply when assessing the suitability of a proposed development or building project.

Andrea Kaiser

Summary of response

- Said the Official Plan must guide development decisions.
- Emphasized that Council should establish policies and frameworks through instruments such as the comprehensive zoning bylaw.
- Said residents believe recent development has been “too big, too fast, too much.”
- Identified adequate supporting infrastructure as her first criterion.
- Identified protection of agricultural land, the natural environment and heritage as her second group of considerations.
- Identified residents’ quality of life and the effect of development on residents as her third criterion.
- Said properly constructed policies would allow the Town to control development while reducing legal risk.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Kaiser identified three discernible criteria: infrastructure capacity; protection of agricultural land, the environment and heritage; and residents’ quality of life. She also explained that these criteria should be implemented through the Official Plan and zoning policies.

Erwin Wiens

Summary of response

- Said development remains a significant and continuing issue.
- Reviewed historical housing-construction levels and said the rate of new construction has declined.
- Distinguished beneficial community projects from other forms of development.
- Identified functional-servicing reports as a requirement before development can proceed.
- Said provincial policies need to be updated to address climate resilience.
- Emphasized completing the new Official Plan, comprehensive zoning bylaw and updated rules for on-farm diversified uses.
- Promised to establish enforceable policies and “guardrails” during the next term.
- Said future provincially mandated growth would increasingly be directed toward Glendale as space becomes limited within the other villages.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Partially**

Assessment: Wiens discussed relevant considerations, including servicing capacity, climate resilience and compliance with updated planning policies. However, he did not clearly identify or enumerate the three most important criteria he personally would apply, as the question specifically requested.

Vaughan Goettler

Summary of response

- Identified whether the development fits its location and surrounding community as his first criterion.
- Said “fit” includes heritage compatibility, building height and the character of the affected area.
- Identified whether the necessary infrastructure is in place before development occurs as his second criterion.
- Identified whether the project benefits residents as his third criterion.
- Said a proposal that fails this three-part test would not satisfy his residents-first approach.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Goettler directly provided three criteria: compatibility with the community, prior availability of supporting infrastructure and benefit to residents. He answered the question concisely and completely.

Question 7 — Full-time or part-time Lord Mayor

Question asked:

The Lord Mayor is the leader of the Town, including as its CEO, and will be Niagara-on-the-Lake’s sole representative on Regional Council. Do you consider the Lord Mayor position primarily a full-time or part-time position? If part-time, how many hours per week would you devote to fulfilling the duties?

Erwin Wiens

Summary of response

- Said he did not want to define the position solely by a fixed number of hours.
- Emphasized efficiency, results and putting in whatever time is necessary to complete the work.
- Referred to possible commitments of 40, 60 or 80 hours per week.
- Highlighted major regional responsibilities involving water, wastewater and finding efficiencies.
- Emphasized building relationships and understanding the respective roles of the Town and Region.
- Promised to work hard at both the Town and the Region.
- Said he would keep councillors informed and involved and help prepare them for future leadership.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Partially**

Assessment: Wiens indicated that he would devote substantial time to the position—potentially 40 to 80 hours per week—and would work as long as necessary. However, he did not clearly answer the central either-or question of whether he considers the position primarily full-time or part-time.

Vaughan Goettler

Summary of response

- Said the Lord Mayor position is full-time.
- Defined a full-time commitment as at least 40 hours per week.
- Promised to remain available whenever required, including participating remotely if illness prevented him from attending in person.
- Said the Lord Mayor must remain closely connected with Council.
- Emphasized building a respectful team even when councillors disagree.
- Said the Lord Mayor should work closely with the CAO and ensure staff are properly treated, hired and mentored.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Goettler directly characterized the position as full-time and specified a minimum commitment of 40 hours per week. He also described the responsibilities that would require that commitment.

Andrea Kaiser

Summary of response

- Said serving as Lord Mayor and at Regional Council would be her primary focus.
- Estimated that she would probably work between 60 and 70 hours per week, including community events.
- Promised to be continuously available to serve residents.
- Emphasized the importance of the Lord Mayor's role as Niagara-on-the-Lake's only Regional Council representative.
- Said her regional experience would allow her to understand the Region's complex budget, agencies, boards and services immediately.
- Identified the continuing threat of amalgamation as requiring an experienced and active regional representative.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Kaiser clearly treated the position as a full-time responsibility and provided an estimated commitment of 60 to 70 hours per week. Although she described the role as her "primary focus" rather than expressly using the words "full-time," her stated hours and promised availability directly answered the substance of the question.

Question 8 — Managing tourism

Question asked:

For generations, tourism has built and shaped the character of Niagara-on-the-Lake. There are increasing concerns, however, about the volume of tourism and its effects on local infrastructure and neighbourhoods. When visitor volumes threaten rather than enhance residents' quality of life, what approach should Niagara-on-the-Lake take to manage tourism in the future?

Vaughan Goettler

Summary of response

- Said tourism must benefit residents and becomes a problem when it negatively affects their quality of life.
- Identified visitor volumes, traffic and parking as current concerns.
- Suggested examining Banff's approach of using parking areas outside the central destination and shuttle buses to transport visitors.
- Acknowledged that tourism is vital to the local economy and enables others to experience Niagara-on-the-Lake.
- Said tourism should be managed according to what residents want.
- Proposed restoring a tourism committee.
- Proposed assigning Council members responsibility for portfolios such as tourism, infrastructure and development.
- Said Council should work closely with the committee to understand residents' concerns and manage tourism accordingly.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Goettler directly addressed how tourism should be managed and proposed specific measures, including peripheral parking, shuttle buses, resident consultation, a tourism committee and Council portfolios.

Andrea Kaiser

Summary of response

- Described tourism as an important part of the local economy that provides employment, business opportunities and amenities.
- Said her tourism background did not mean she supported unrestricted tourism growth.
- Placed agriculture, residents' quality of life and the environment first.
- Said tourism growth and residents' quality of life can coexist if impacts are properly mitigated.
- Proposed restoring the former Tourism Economic Management Committee.
- Said the committee should include business owners, Council members and residents.
- Cited the relocation of tour-bus drop-offs from King Street to the Parks Canada property at Fort George as an example of collaborative mitigation.
- Called for moderation, careful planning and environmentally, economically and socially sustainable tourism.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Kaiser provided a clear approach that combined tourism's economic benefits with protection of residents, agriculture and the environment. She proposed a specific collaborative body and gave a practical example of how it could reduce neighbourhood impacts.

Erwin Wiens

Summary of response

- Described tourism as a major economic engine that helped sustain the Town and its agricultural sector.
- Said local businesses, employees and residents all benefit from tourism-supported amenities.
- Rejected framing the issue as tourism versus residents.
- Acknowledged that tourism must be managed so it does not diminish residents' quality of life.
- Referred to the updated parking study as a means of determining how parking should be managed.
- Said approximately \$4 million in annual parking revenue reduces property-tax requirements and helps fund transit.
- Referred to the Town's recently completed tourism strategy.
- Proposed continuing to revise and implement that strategy rather than replacing it.
- Emphasized collaboration among residents, businesses and wineries, supported by clear policy "guardrails."

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Wiens directly described a future management approach based on implementing and updating the existing tourism strategy, reviewing parking arrangements and maintaining collaborative policy controls. He also explained how tourism and parking revenues benefit residents while acknowledging the need to protect their quality of life.

Question 9 — Locations for residential intensification

Question asked:

Are you prepared to identify specific areas or sites within Niagara-on-the-Lake's various urban boundaries where intensification, primarily residential intensification, should occur? Where are those areas or sites?

Andrea Kaiser

Summary of response

- Said very little land remains available for infill development in Old Town.
- Opposed extending development beyond the existing urban boundaries into the Greenbelt.
- Identified Glendale as the primary area for additional development and intensification.
- Acknowledged concerns that Glendale residents sometimes feel their community is expected to absorb a disproportionate share of growth.
- Said additional development could bring services such as grocery stores and pharmacies and help create a walkable community.
- Said development should respect the distinct cultural landscape of each village.
- Supported appropriate development that provides attainable housing for younger people, families and seniors.
- Acknowledged that she did not have additional specific locations immediately available.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Kaiser directly identified Glendale as a specific area where intensification should occur and explained the intended benefits and necessary protections. Although she did not identify additional sites, the question did not require a particular number of locations.

Erwin Wiens

Summary of response

- Said the Province establishes the Town's required population-growth targets.
- Identified Glendale as the principal location for future growth and residential intensification.
- Referred to the completed Glendale Secondary Plan and Official Plan as establishing where growth should occur.

- Said the other four villages have limited remaining space for additional development.
- Connected Glendale's growth with a proposed transit hub, grocery stores, a possible high school and employment opportunities.
- Said an urban-design panel would review development proposals.
- Referred to airport zoning regulations that would affect permitted building heights in Glendale.
- Proposed using secondary plans, character studies and planning policies to ensure that development reflects Niagara-on-the-Lake's character.
- Said Glendale should become a complete community rather than being left without adequate services and amenities.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Wiens directly identified Glendale as the principal location for intensification and explained the planning, design, transportation and service considerations that would guide development there.

Vaughan Goettler

Summary of response

- Opposed development outside existing urban boundaries and into Greenbelt or agricultural land.
- Identified Glendale as the natural principal location for future growth under the Glendale Secondary Plan.
- Said Glendale residents should not feel that their community is a “dumping ground” for development unwanted elsewhere.
- Called for tasteful development shaped by resident participation.
- Said the amenities Glendale residents require should accompany its growth.
- Identified Old Town, Chautauqua, Queenston, Virgil and St. Davids as having only limited opportunities for additional infill housing.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Goettler directly identified Glendale as the principal area for intensification and also addressed the limited infill potential within the Town's other urban communities. He explained the conditions under which growth in Glendale should proceed.

Question 10 — Staff not following Council's direction

Question asked:

The Lord Mayor has a direct interface with the Town's CAO and has the authority to convey the policy direction and objectives established by Council to Town staff through that interface. What actions would you take as Lord Mayor if Town staff chose not to follow Council's wishes?

Erwin Wiens

Summary of response

- Confirmed his understanding that the question concerned staff failing to carry out Council's direction.
- Said he was hard-pressed to identify an occasion when that had occurred.
- Explained that Council establishes policy, passes motions and gives direction to staff.
- Said the CAO is responsible for ensuring that Council's direction and policies are implemented.
- Treated compliance with Council's direction as an established obligation of the CAO.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Partially**

Assessment: Wiens correctly identified the CAO as responsible for implementing Council's direction. However, he did not explain what action he would personally take as Lord Mayor if the CAO or staff nevertheless failed or refused to carry out that direction. He did not identify any escalation, reporting, deadline-setting or accountability process.

Vaughan Goettler

Summary of response

- Said the Municipal Act identifies the Lord Mayor as the municipality's CEO and that the responsibility must be taken seriously.
- Said the CAO technically reports to the Lord Mayor.
- Proposed working "shoulder to shoulder" with the CAO.
- Expressed concern that some residents believe staff are directing Council and that Council is merely approving staff recommendations.
- Said such a reversal of roles would be inconsistent with how municipal government is intended to operate.
- Promised to ensure that everyone understood their respective roles within a residents-first administration.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Partially**

Assessment: Goettler addressed the governance relationship among the Lord Mayor, Council, the CAO and staff. However, he did not specify what concrete action he would take if staff failed to implement Council's direction. His promise to work closely with the CAO and clarify roles did not identify an enforcement or escalation process.

Andrea Kaiser

Summary of response

- Said her initial approach would be collaborative with the CAO, staff, residents and councillors.

- Said that when Council gives direction and it is not fulfilled, the Lord Mayor must press to have the direction carried out.
- Described a Regional Council motion requesting alternatives for allocating policing costs.
- Said staff initially returned with a report recommending the status quo rather than providing the requested alternatives.
- Contacted the CAO, commissioner and director to point out that the report had not answered Council's direction.
- Worked with other councillors to have the report returned to staff.
- Said staff subsequently produced the requested options and began work on a broader review involving the Police Services Board.
- Presented this as an example of the persistence and escalation she would use when Council's direction was not followed.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Kaiser directly answered the question with a concrete example. She identified the actions she would take: contact senior administration, document the failure to respond, enlist other councillors, return the matter to staff and continue pressing until Council receives the work it directed.

Question 11 — Niagara District Airport

Question asked:

The Niagara District Airport has been identified as a potential economic-development and transportation asset for the Region. Do you support or oppose efforts by the municipal partners to invest in and expand the airport's role in supporting tourism, business investment, aviation services and broader regional connectivity?

Vaughan Goettler

Summary of response

- Supported improving the existing airport.
- Said he was not prepared to support expanding the airport at this time.
- Based his position on discussions with residents, most of whom he said did not favour expansion.
- Said he would listen to residents before deciding whether future expansion would be appropriate.
- Identified noise, pollution, de-icing, lighting and increased aircraft traffic as concerns.
- Said expansion could result in the loss of Greenbelt or agricultural land.
- Distinguished between improving the existing airport and substantially expanding its operations.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Goettler clearly stated his present position: he supported improvements but not expansion at that time. He also explained the resident, environmental, agricultural and operational concerns underlying his position.

Andrea Kaiser

Summary of response

- Said there was insufficient information to support airport expansion at that time.
- Said she was not opposed to improvements to the existing airport.
- Called for a fully transparent process with meaningful resident participation.
- Said the Town must understand the effects of expansion on residents and the environment.
- Referred to residents' concerns about flight paths over their homes.
- Suggested examining Hamilton International Airport as a potentially underused alternative for additional regional flights.
- Said public consultation could generate other possible solutions.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Partially**

Assessment: Kaiser explained why she was not prepared to support expansion and identified the information and consultation she would require before deciding. However, the question expressly asked whether she supported or opposed expansion. She withheld a definitive position rather than directly choosing either support or opposition.

Erwin Wiens

Summary of response

- Supported responsible growth of the airport.
- Referred to the airport's 20-year master plan and continuing public consultation.
- Supported using the provincial grant for studies and improvements to the apron, mechanical facilities and existing terminal.
- Said the grant would also fund airport zoning regulations affecting development in Glendale.
- Emphasized that the airport plan was not a blank cheque.
- Said projected growth would add approximately 15 flights per day by 2045, including air ambulance, training, private and some commercial flights.
- Said expansion should be the final stage after studies and earlier improvements are completed.
- Expressed strong concern about any expansion onto agricultural land.
- Said the immediate priority was maintaining and improving the existing airport without imposing the cost on Niagara-on-the-Lake taxpayers.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Wiens supported investment and qualified future expansion through a staged planning process. He explained the improvements he supported, the projected scale of growth and his concern about agricultural-land loss.

Question 12 — Ensuring a greener future

Question asked:

Niagara-on-the-Lake has a climate-change action plan containing approximately 27 actions. What would you do as Lord Mayor to ensure a greener future for Niagara-on-the-Lake?

Andrea Kaiser

Summary of response

- Said climate resilience and adequate infrastructure must be priorities.
- Acknowledged that major infrastructure improvements will require substantial capital funding and time.
- Proposed reducing stormwater before it enters municipal drainage systems.
- Identified rain gardens, drainage swales and permeable road and driveway surfaces as possible measures.
- Said the Town should review the existing climate-action plan and determine what work remains outstanding.
- Proposed examining successful climate-resilience measures used elsewhere.
- Said Niagara-on-the-Lake should strive to become a Canadian leader in municipal climate resilience.
- Argued that preventative investment would reduce future costs, property damage and personal losses.
- Committed to making climate resilience a leading priority as Lord Mayor.

*Did the candidate answer the question? Yes

Assessment: Kaiser identified specific measures to improve climate resilience, committed to reviewing and advancing the existing action plan, and explained why preventative investment was necessary.

Erwin Wiens

Summary of response

- Corrected the premise that only approximately six actions had been completed.
- Said 23 of the 27 climate-action-plan initiatives had been completed and that the remaining four were long-term measures.
- Referred to the appointment of a dedicated climate-change coordinator.
- Said the Official Plan incorporates climate resilience, stormwater management, green infrastructure and environmental protection.
- Identified municipal investments in drainage and flood mitigation.

- Referred to the purchase of approximately nine acres in St. Davids for a new stormwater pond.
- Highlighted work involving the tree canopy, natural-asset management, waterfront planning, coastal protection and active transportation.
- Proposed achieving net-positive tree planting, using other municipalities and the Niagara Parks Commission as examples.
- Said the Town must advocate for provincial funding and policy changes because it cannot address climate challenges alone.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Wiens directly addressed implementation of the climate-action plan, corrected the moderator’s completion figure and identified specific existing and future environmental initiatives. He also explained the need for provincial funding and regulatory support.

Vaughan Goettler

Summary of response

- Said the term “100-year storm” creates a false sense of security because severe storms are occurring much more frequently.
- Linked flooding risks both to climate change and to the increasing use of impermeable surfaces.
- Said development approvals must account for later hardscaping, swimming pools and expanded driveways that reduce water absorption.
- Proposed considering requirements for permeable driveways and similar development measures.
- Acknowledged that such requirements might increase initial construction costs but said they could reduce future flooding costs.
- Suggested examining electric vehicles for the municipal fleet.
- Proposed considering solar power and other measures that would make the municipality cleaner.
- Pointed to a local net-zero development as evidence that more sustainable construction is achievable.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Goettler proposed specific measures involving development standards, permeable surfaces, electric municipal vehicles, solar power and net-zero construction. These measures directly addressed how he would promote a greener and more climate-resilient community.

Question 13 — Future use of the former NDSS property

Question asked:

Niagara District Secondary School was formerly a centre of community activity. A private

school now rents the building, but relatively little activity is visible on the property. As Lord Mayor, would you begin working toward a new use for the building and its extensive lands?

Erwin Wiens

Summary of response

- Reviewed the closure of Niagara District Secondary School and previous efforts to preserve a local high school.
- Said the property had been purchased, severed and subsequently sold into private ownership.
- Identified Vine Ridge Academy as the private school currently operating there.
- Expressed openness to public-private partnerships involving recreation, youth services or a swimming pool.
- Said the Town should work with local institutions and other stakeholders to maximize opportunities for young people.
- Made restoration of a high school in Niagara-on-the-Lake his principal focus.
- Identified Glendale or another suitable area as a possible high-school location.
- Proposed working with school-board trustees, neighbouring mayors, the MPP and the Province to secure support and funding.
- Committed to developing a viable plan and advocating for a local high school.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Partially**

Assessment: Wiens supported exploring community partnerships and strongly advocated restoring a high school to Niagara-on-the-Lake. However, much of his answer concerned obtaining a high school generally, potentially in Glendale, rather than establishing a new use for the existing NDSS building and lands. He did not identify a specific proposal or process for working with the privately owned property.

Vaughan Goettler

Summary of response

- Agreed that Niagara-on-the-Lake should work toward restoring a local high school.
- Acknowledged that obtaining a high school would take time.
- Expanded the issue to include other community needs, such as daycare, after-school programs and facilities that allow seniors to age in place.
- Referred to students being bused from St. Davids and Niagara-on-the-Lake to schools and programs elsewhere.
- Said the Town must use its institutional space more effectively.
- Cited Parliament Oak as an example of institutional land being converted to a commercial use.
- Said the Town should not surrender any more institutional land.
- Called for planning that serves residents from childhood through old age.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Partially**

Assessment: Goettler identified potential community needs that institutional property could serve and supported working toward a local high school. However, he did not propose a particular future use or a concrete process for the existing NDSS building and lands.

Andrea Kaiser

Summary of response

- Expressed general agreement with restoring important community services.
- Questioned whether a public-private partnership would be appropriate.
- Said important community assets should remain under public ownership.
- Recalled previous efforts to persuade the school board to retain a high school in Niagara-on-the-Lake.
- Said municipal leaders sometimes must work beyond their traditional jurisdiction to secure necessary services.
- Identified a local high school, urgent-care centre, seniors' services, long-term-care facility and daycare as community needs.
- Referred to regional initiatives attracting doctors and providing senior services as examples of broader municipal advocacy.
- Said she was prepared to pursue services required by residents even when they fell outside the Town's traditional responsibilities.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Partially**

Assessment: Kaiser identified several possible community services and indicated that she would advocate for them. However, she did not select a proposed use for the former NDSS property or explain what steps she would take regarding the privately owned building and lands.

Question 14 — Principal priority at Regional Council

Question asked:

As Lord Mayor, you will be Niagara-on-the-Lake's only representative at Regional Council. If elected, what single most important action would you champion there? What would be your number-one regional priority?

Vaughan Goettler

Summary of response

- Said his first action would be to arrange an immediate meeting with the mayors of Niagara's smaller municipalities.
- Proposed building cooperation among municipalities facing similar issues and opportunities.

- Said smaller municipalities must work together to avoid being overrun by policies favoured by larger municipalities.
- Focused particularly on preventing a broad regional tourism strategy from being imposed where it might not suit individual communities.
- Emphasized that regional tourism policies must reflect Niagara-on-the-Lake residents' interests.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Goettler identified a specific initial action—meeting and building an alliance with the mayors of smaller municipalities—and connected it to his principal regional concern regarding locally appropriate tourism policy.

Andrea Kaiser

Summary of response

- Acknowledged the importance of collaborating with other regional councillors.
- Said recent provincial changes had removed land-use planning from the Region's responsibilities.
- Identified fairer allocation of regional policing costs as her number-one priority.
- Referred to her existing motion seeking alternatives to allocating policing costs primarily according to property assessment.
- Said she would take that initiative "over the finish line."
- Argued that a revised allocation formula could produce significant savings for Niagara-on-the-Lake taxpayers.
- Recognized that achieving change would require support from both smaller and larger municipalities.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Kaiser clearly identified one regional priority: changing the allocation of policing costs so that Niagara-on-the-Lake pays a fairer share. She also identified the existing initiative she would continue pursuing to accomplish it.

Erwin Wiens

Summary of response

- Identified preventing municipal amalgamation as Niagara-on-the-Lake's most important regional issue.
- Said local decision-making and the Town's identity would be lost if Niagara-on-the-Lake were absorbed into a larger municipality.
- Referred to a coalition of eight municipalities that had opposed amalgamation.
- Said the coalition had presented economic and political arguments to the Province.

- Claimed that previous amalgamation efforts had been stopped but warned that the issue would return.
- Said four municipalities favoured amalgamation.
- Identified the position of the next Regional Chair as an important consideration in determining the Town's strategy.
- Promised to use his relationships with Niagara's mayors and the provincial government to continue opposing amalgamation.
- Connected local government with residents' ability to be heard and to retain control over agriculture, heritage and community identity.

***Did the candidate answer the question? Yes**

Assessment: Wiens directly identified preventing amalgamation as his number-one regional priority. He also described the coalition-building, provincial advocacy and regional political strategy he would use to pursue it.

Andrea Kaiser

Opening statement

- Presented herself as an experienced candidate prepared to assume the responsibilities of Lord Mayor immediately.
- Emphasized 15 years of service as a municipal councillor and regional councillor.
- Said serving Niagara-on-the-Lake residents would be her primary focus and priority.
- Distinguished municipal government from running a private business and said she understood both.
- Emphasized the importance of regional experience because the Lord Mayor will be the Town's only elected representative at Regional Council.
- Rejected the suggestion that her experience meant she represented the status quo.
- Said residents had told her they wanted change, greater transparency, improved collaboration and elected officials who listen.
- Identified listening and finding common ground as central elements of effective leadership.
- Promised to protect the natural environment and village character while maintaining a strong economy.
- Offered leadership based on mutual respect, communication, collaboration and reduced divisiveness.

Closing statement

- Said the election concerned the future of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

- Argued that the Town can accommodate responsible growth while protecting agricultural land, heritage and residents' quality of life.
- Said a strong economy can coexist with a residents-first approach.
- Emphasized listening, transparency, collaboration and practical problem-solving.
- Said the Lord Mayor must provide Niagara-on-the-Lake with a strong voice at Regional Council and defend the Town's independence.
- Presented her municipal, regional, business and community experience as preparation for the position.
- Asked voters to consider her track record, not merely the length of her experience.
- Again presented herself as a candidate for change rather than the status quo.
- Said she was prepared to begin working immediately and make service to residents her highest priority.

Erwin Wiens

Opening statement

- Expressed a personal attachment to Niagara-on-the-Lake's people, farms, vineyards, orchards, villages, heritage, river and lake.
- Described the Lord Mayor's role as one of stewardship for the next generation.
- Presented protection as the central theme of his candidacy.
- Connected that theme to his experience as a police officer, volunteer firefighter and hockey goaltender.
- Promised to protect families, farms, heritage, local decision-making and residents' quality of life.
- Said the Town could protect its character while remaining confident about its future.
- Called for disciplined use of tax dollars and reduced wasteful spending.
- Supported balanced development that respects heritage, infrastructure and the community.
- Emphasized implementing the newly adopted Official Plan.
- Identified agricultural protection and a strong local economy as priorities.
- Opposed amalgamation and promised to defend Niagara-on-the-Lake's identity and local decision-making.
- Promised to work hard, listen and provide full-time commitment to the position.

Closing statement

- Said the forum had addressed taxes, development, agriculture, infrastructure, heritage and the Town's future.
- Argued that Niagara-on-the-Lake should remain substantially as it is because its existing character and economy are successful.
- Said the election was not the time for change but for continuity and long-term planning.
- Called for policies, structures and enforceable "guardrails" to protect the Town.
- Emphasized long-term planning for infrastructure, schools and future growth.
- Said policies must be legally defensible and capable of surviving litigation.

- Warned against promising actions that municipal government cannot legally or practically deliver.
- Presented his eight years of municipal experience as evidence that he understands how policies and government processes operate.
- Promised community participation in future decisions.
- Asked voters to allow him to preserve the Town's character while preparing it for the future.

Vaughan Goettler

Opening statement

- Said Niagara-on-the-Lake required a change in direction.
- Called for greater openness, honesty and transparency from Council and Town staff.
- Said public trust in municipal government had been lost and needed to be rebuilt.
- Presented his experience as a successful businessperson as relevant preparation for the Lord Mayor's position.
- Argued that the Town should be managed with financial and organizational discipline.
- Described residents as the true owners or "CEO" of the municipality.
- Said the existing governing structure placed residents at the bottom and needed to be reversed.
- Promised a residents-first administration in which Council listens to residents before making decisions.
- Committed to serving as Lord Mayor full-time for one dollar.
- Said he would donate the remainder of the Lord Mayor's salary to charities throughout the Town's villages.
- Promised not to use strong mayor powers.

Closing statement

- Repeated that Niagara-on-the-Lake required a change in direction.
- Called the election exceptionally important because of the continuing possibility of amalgamation.
- Said the Town must remain strong, independent and united.
- Criticized the current Council for having gone off course on some issues.
- Repeated his call for a full-time Lord Mayor.
- Promised to restore transparency, trust and orderly municipal administration.
- Called for stronger unity among the Town's villages and agricultural community.
- Said Glendale must not be treated as an orphan or as a location for unwanted development.
- Supported smart development in appropriate locations and again cited Parliament Oak as an example of an unsuitable decision.
- Called for urgent attention to aging infrastructure, flooding, drainage ditches and irrigation systems.
- Emphasized the distinct infrastructure needs of grape growers and tender-fruit farmers.

- Promised to control property taxes and demand better regional services for the taxes residents pay.
- Called for a community that supports families, children, young people and seniors.
- Promised complete transparency concerning the use of public funds.
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- ***NOTE REGARDING THE USE OF CHATGPT ANALYSIS**
- The summaries above were prepared from the actual transcript of the Lord Mayor candidates' meeting. Any assessment as to whether a candidate fully answered, partially answered or did not answer a question was generated independently by ChatGPT based on the transcript. These assessments do not necessarily reflect the views of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association or any of its directors or members. Readers are encouraged to review the complete transcript and video and reach their own conclusions.
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