

NOTLRA Council Candidates Forum Analysis

September 25, 2026 | Transcript based review

This review places bullet summaries of each candidate's opening and closing remarks first, followed by all eight forum questions. "Yes," "Partially," and "No" assess how fully a response addressed the question, not the merits or factual accuracy of the candidate's position. This is an independent assessment and does not necessarily reflect the views of NOTLRA or its members.

Source and method

Source: Otter AI transcript exported by Stuart McCormack, approximately 2 hours 1 minute. Timestamps identify the start of each turn. The transcript contains recognition errors in names and place names; obvious spellings have been normalized in these summaries without treating substantive assertions as verified facts. Moderator introductions and turn order were used where a speaker label absorbed the moderator's words. Brief unidentified fragments do not affect the assessments. Audio was not supplied for independent verification. Sandra O'Connor's closing clarification about budget priorities is included in Question 5.

Opening and closing statements

Sandra O'Connor

Opening 1:35

- Born and raised in Niagara; cited studies in physical geography and urban studies, research work, and business ownership.
- Said six years on council demonstrated a resident-first approach, integrity, and consistency with earlier commitments.
- Advocated responsible growth supported by infrastructure and protection of heritage, environment, neighbourhood character, and public trust.

Closing 1:58:43

- Added a concrete budget proposal: expand and raise downtown paid parking, while providing free resident passes.
- Asked for another term on her record and urged voters to demand more from councillors and choose the town's future vision carefully.

Maria Mavridis

Opening 5:11

- Described her roots in several NOTL communities, raising her daughter locally, charitable fundraising, and service on tourism, business, youth, and civic bodies.
- Said she asks difficult questions and has learned that provincial policy, regional jurisdiction, legal duties, budgets, and infrastructure constrain council choices.
- Pointed to policy and bylaw changes, organizational change, and infrastructure investment as work begun during her four years on council.

Closing 1:57:03

- Said she is willing to confront difficult issues, remain accessible, and stand behind decisions even when unpopular.

- Invoked her community fundraising and council experience and asked for four more years of questioning, listening, and acting.

Karen Taylor Jones

Opening 8:09

- Introduced herself as Karen Jones, explaining that she also uses Taylor, and described a family connection to NOTL public service.
- Described operating her own painting and renovation business and serving in roles with Legion Branch 124 and its Ladies Auxiliary.
- Acknowledged she does not know all the answers and promised to listen and learn.

Closing 1:56:18

- Said the forum was difficult for her but worthwhile because residents could hear who she is.
- Expressed her wish to serve on council and take part in future decisions.

Andrew Niven

Opening 10:06

- Addressed his appointment to a council vacancy, distinguishing appointment from election and saying he sought to earn residents' trust through his work.
- Cited leadership in the chamber, tourism and wineries organizations, board service, and community volunteering.
- Advocated growth in the right place and scale with adequate roads, stormwater and wastewater infrastructure, while protecting agriculture, heritage, neighbourhoods, and local business.

Closing 1:54:51

- Thanked residents and fellow candidates and reflected on two years of council service and disagreement among people who care about the town.
- Asked for support to continue thoughtful, responsible, accountable decisions while protecting community character.

Rick Mills

Opening 12:52

- Described lifelong residence, over 30 years in industrial management including 25 as plant manager, and more than 25 years in pastoral ministry.
- Presented "listen, learn, and lend my voice" as his approach, drawing on family service and his knowledge of the town.
- Promised to listen to residents and represent their voices at council.

Closing 1:51:57

- Described managing a hazardous workplace and participating in seven labour negotiations, seeking to bridge management and employees.
- Said he listened across the town's villages, would keep seeking residents' advice, and would work collaboratively as a resident first.

Tim Balasiuk

Opening 15:21

- Described deep family roots in NOTL, heritage and hospitality connections, and service on the Heritage Committee, accommodation-tax committee, and tourism board.
- Said four years on council taught him to listen, do the homework, explain decisions, and remain accountable even when people disagree.
- Advocated responsible growth, infrastructure work, protection of heritage, agricultural land and green space, and respect for taxpayers.

Closing 1:50:25

- Recalled the Commons, Parliament Oak, Randwood and other local experiences to explain his attachment to heritage and community.
- Said he had changed through council service, promised his full effort, and sought another term.

Questions and responses

AI was asked to assess whether the candidate answered the question YES NO or PARTIALLY

1 Official Plan and development exceptions

Question at 18:26: Should proposals comply with the Official Plan and bylaws? Which exceptions are acceptable, and could approvals set precedents?

Maria Mavridis — Partially

- Said amendments are permitted and each application must be assessed against policy and its effects.
- Opposed proposals she considered to have excessive or harmful amendments; questioned assurances that approvals never set precedents.

Assessment: No clear threshold or category of acceptable exception.

Karen Taylor Jones — Partially

- Opposed some amendments that threaten the historic character; said she would fight such changes.

Assessment: Did not define acceptable exceptions or directly address precedent.

Andrew Niven — Partially

- Said developers should follow the plan and that even one amendment is too many for him.
- Would also weigh community character and cited his voting record.

Assessment: Did not directly address precedent.

Rick Mills — Partially

- Said the plan should be honoured, with minimal exceptions assessed seriously by council.
- Expressed concern about the consequences of exceptions.

Assessment: Did not specify a test for acceptable exceptions or explain precedent.

Tim Balasiuk — Yes

- Expects compliance but distinguished receipt of an application from its approval.
- Supported small variances through the Committee of Adjustment and recognized both individual merits and precedential effects.

Assessment: Addressed all three components; “small” was not further defined.

Sandra O’Connor — Partially

- Said amendments should be extraordinary exceptions rather than routine.
- The acceptability of an exception would depend on the type and merits of the proposal.

Assessment: Did not directly address precedential effects.

2 Strong mayor powers

Question at 30:38: Would you join the Lord Mayor in overriding a council majority, and under what circumstances?

Karen Taylor Jones — Partially

- Said the identity of the Lord Mayor would affect her decision.
- Said council should work as council.

Assessment: Gave no firm yes or no and no circumstances or governing principle.

Andrew Niven — Yes

- Opposed strong mayor powers and said he had voted against their use.
- Said council should retain a meaningful role and be accountable to residents.

Assessment: Explicitly said he would not support their use.

Rick Mills — Partially

- Opposed use in principle and hoped the tool would remain unused.
- Would not promise an absolute answer without knowing future circumstances.

Assessment: Left open when, if ever, he would support an override.

Tim Balasiuk — Partially

- Argued a strong council can check the mayor; cited the budget process as a useful application.
- Said he would oppose use on more contentious subjects.

Assessment: Identified a favourable example and a broad limit, but did not clearly say when he personally would join an override of a majority.

Sandra O'Connor — Partially

- Opposed strong mayor and strong regional chair powers, citing her past opposition.
- Objected to using mayoral powers for a building on agricultural land and disputed that the budget outcome depended on those powers.

Assessment: Her opposition is clear, but she did not expressly answer whether she would ever join a particular override.

Maria Mavridis — Partially

- Said she seconded a motion opposing strong mayor powers and supported council's reversal of a decision involving agricultural land.
- Credited the CAO and councillors' work, rather than the powers alone, for the budget process.

Assessment: Opposed the powers generally but did not specify whether any future override would receive her support.

3 Severe weather and flooding

Question at 39:16: What should council and town staff do to prepare for future severe weather and flooding?

Andrew Niven — Yes

- Prioritize long-term planning and infrastructure investment in the next budget.

- Coordinate on St. Davids flooding, including regional sewers, drainage and pond issues.

Assessment: Identified planning, investment and a local coordination problem.

Rick Mills — Yes

- Use the Official Plan to guide development and infrastructure choices.
- Maintain ditches, improve infrastructure, consider hard surfaces and green space, and pursue provincial help.

Assessment: Identified several concrete areas of work, though without sequencing or cost.

Tim Balasiuk — Yes

- Cited his own flooding and a stated \$433,000 review of storm sewers, catch basins and retention ponds.
- Favoured locating, cleaning and repairing existing drainage assets before larger redesign.

Assessment: Identified an operational sequence; dollar figure is his statement, not independently verified here.

Sandra O'Connor — Yes

- Prioritize the worst-hit areas; review development stormwater standards earlier and increase storm-design criteria.
- Expand ponds and culverts, clear ditches, use green infrastructure, and advance the Four Mile Creek watershed work.

Assessment: Provided specific planning, infrastructure and prioritization steps.

Maria Mavridis — Yes

- Cited asset management and renewed infrastructure funding, while acknowledging deferred work and ditch maintenance gaps.
- Favoured updating storm criteria and considering increased impermeable surfaces on private lots.

Assessment: Identified policy and asset-management steps, although fewer specific project commitments.

Karen Taylor Jones — Yes

- Called for proactive work rather than reaction after flooding.
- Pointed to overgrown irrigation ditches and urged clearing drainage routes and accounting for changing weather.

Assessment: Proposed a tangible maintenance measure and preventive approach.

4 Relationships with developers

Question at 51:52: Do you have any business, financial or family relationships with developers who may submit proposals to council?

Rick Mills — Yes

- Answered no.

Assessment: Direct answer.

Tim Balasiuk — Yes

- Answered no.

Assessment: Direct answer.

Sandra O'Connor — Yes

- Answered no and clarified she is not related to the O'Connor Real Estate branch mentioned to her.

Assessment: Direct answer with a clarification.

Maria Mavridis — Yes

- Disclosed that her father owns property with a council application and said she declared a conflict.
- Said she has no other relationships or conflicts with developers.

Assessment: Disclosed the relevant family connection; whether it creates a legal conflict is a separate issue.

Karen Taylor Jones — Yes

- Said no; added that Mr. Marotta called to ask whether she wished to buy Parliament Oak School, and she jokingly asked whether he would lend her the money.

Assessment: Disclosed the contact; the exchange as described does not establish an ongoing relationship.

Andrew Niven — Yes

- Answered no.

Assessment: Direct answer.

5 Budget priorities for residents

Question at 55:30: What specific budget and funding allocations would you champion to put residents ahead of visitor and developer needs?

Tim Balasiuk — Partially

- Discussed falling development-charge revenue and the need not to rely on it.
- Emphasized affordable housing partnerships and use of accommodation-tax revenue to ease taxpayers' burden.

Assessment: Discussed funding sources and balance, but did not name a clear set of resident-first allocations.

Sandra O'Connor — Yes

- Prioritized essential services, infrastructure and financial sustainability, with flood mitigation as a likely focus.
- Favoured grants, accommodation tax, parking revenue and community-benefits funding for visitor or growth impacts; in closing, proposed higher and wider downtown paid parking with free resident passes.

Assessment: The closing statement supplied the concrete parking allocation and resident benefit she said she had omitted initially.

Maria Mavridis — Partially

- Prioritized infrastructure and deferred maintenance while avoiding an unconditional tax freeze.
- Would seek efficiencies, grants, development-related funding, accommodation-tax and parking revenue.

Assessment: Named a central allocation but left other specific spending priorities and trade-offs open.

Karen Taylor Jones — Partially

- Urged scrutiny of spending and revenue and warned against treating reserves as inexhaustible.
- Acknowledged she lacked enough budget knowledge to offer more.

Assessment: Gave a fiscal principle but no specific allocation.

Andrew Niven — Yes

- Would prioritize core services and critical infrastructure with life-cycle planning.
- Would pursue efficiencies and grants without reducing resident service.

Assessment: Named the principal spending priorities, though no amounts or projects.

Rick Mills — Partially

- Put essential services and safe living conditions for residents first.
- Said he would learn the budget process and resist perceived priority for development and business interests.

Assessment: Gave a priority category, but no specific funding allocation or project.

6 Three steps to manage tourism

Question at 1:08:44: Identify three specific steps over four years to balance tourism with residents' needs.

Sandra O'Connor — Yes

- Implement accommodation-tax allocation criteria, including an infrastructure share.
- Revisit short-term-rental recommendations, including hosted and unhosted units and neighbourhood effects.
- Consult residents meaningfully on tourism impacts such as parking.

Assessment: Three discernible steps.

Maria Mavridis — Partially

- Advocated quality rather than volume of visitors and protecting resident quality of life.
- Discussed reviewing short-term-rental data, taxation and licensing after a temporary freeze.

Assessment: Discussed issues and a rental review but did not lay out three distinct actionable steps.

Karen Taylor Jones — No

- Called for balance between tourism's economic benefit and residents' quality of life.

Assessment: Offered no specific steps, although she stated the intended outcome.

Andrew Niven — Yes

- Obtain reliable visitation and hotel-occupancy data.
- Implement the town's tourism strategy and deploy accumulated accommodation-tax funds for community infrastructure.
- Consider geographic caps on unhosted short-term rentals while supporting hosted B&Bs.

Assessment: Three specific steps.

Rick Mills — Partially

- Consider restoring a tourism committee.
- Implement the existing tourism strategy with staff and listen to residents about impacts.

Assessment: Two broad measures, without three specific steps or a timetable.

Tim Balasiuk — Partially

- Improve local tourism data and consult residents about impacts.
- Cap short-term rentals, potentially through one-in, one-out replacement and neighbourhood limits.

Assessment: Identified several actions, but the data and consultation proposals were broad and did not amount to a clearly developed three-step plan.

7 Heritage risks and projects

Question at 1:24:27: Which specific emerging risks or projects may affect heritage and require sensitivity?

Maria Mavridis — Yes

- Named the Rand Estate application, a proposed Shaw theatre building on Queen Street, and vulnerable undesignated buildings.
- Urged stronger policies and also identified agricultural land as at risk.

Assessment: Named specific projects and risks.

Karen Taylor Jones — Yes

- Named Randwood's grounds and gardens, the proposed hotel, and the scale and height of the Royal George project.

Assessment: Named specific properties and effects of concern.

Andrew Niven — Yes

- Identified growth inconsistent with community character and the risk of municipal amalgamation.
- Favoured advance planning policies rather than reactive decisions.

Assessment: Identified concrete categories of risk, though few named sites.

Rick Mills — Yes

- Identified amalgamation, irresponsible development and the Rand Estate as threats to heritage and residents.
- Favoured limiting compromises on essential heritage features.

Assessment: Named risks and an active project.

Tim Balasiuk — Yes

- Identified infill and subdivision of large heritage lots, as well as incomplete designations.
- Named Randwood and Parliament Oak and advocated work with homeowners and continued protection.

Assessment: Named risks and projects with proposed responses.

Sandra O'Connor — Yes

- Named Rand Estate, Royal George, the deadline for heritage designations, airport expansion's effect on agricultural land, and potential Glendale height impacts on escarpment views.
- Also raised the regional governance voice for heritage.

Assessment: Named multiple concrete projects and risks.

8 Transparency and recorded votes

Question at 1:38:30: What actions support fairness, transparency and accountability in planning and dealings with residents and businesses? Should all council votes be recorded?

Karen Taylor Jones — Yes

- Notify and consult residents before decisions are settled; explain proposed changes.
- Supported recording all council votes.

Assessment: Gave a process change and a direct answer on votes.

Andrew Niven — Yes

- Supported electronic recorded voting and explaining the reasons for votes.
- Emphasized councillor accessibility and responding to residents.

Assessment: Gave clear vote and communication measures.

Rick Mills — Partially

- Supported electronic voting results and honest communication within applicable confidentiality rules.

Assessment: Answered recorded voting directly; other fairness measures remained general.

Tim Balasiuk — Partially

- Supported recording all votes and using the existing eSCRIBE voting function.
- Favoured disclosure of voting after closed-session matters are settled, subject to the reason for confidentiality.

Assessment: Concrete on votes, but did not substantially address planning and business/resident interactions.

Sandra O'Connor — Yes

- Supported recorded votes and activation of available software.
- Cited explaining votes, media access and publishing site-plan documents as transparency measures.

Assessment: Addressed voting, planning information and public accountability.

Maria Mavridis — Yes

- Supported electronic recorded voting and public votes with reasons following closed sessions.
- Cited direct consultation with Queen Street businesses before related decisions.

Assessment: Addressed voting and engagement with affected businesses.