

Steve McGuinness responses

NOTLRA Residents Association

(PLEASE NOTE THAT THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE VERBATIM AND HAVE NOT BEEN ALTERED IN ANY WAY)

You may choose to respond or not. All responses are to be forwarded to notelection2026@gmail.com

Questions received from residents that may not have been fully addressed at the forums.

Candidates are encouraged to respond and forward their responses to the following email address. Note that questions and responses will be posted on our notelection.ca website.

For both Lord Mayor and Councillor candidates

Q1 - Can you tell me how and why your approach would be different than what the existing council members have been taking in their governing?

I am a Chartered Professional Accountant with an MBA, and I would bring that unique professional experience and discipline to the council table. My approach would differ in three ways. First, I would apply a rigorous, fact-based, analytical approach to every decision — reading the staff reports, the consultants' studies and the financial statements before the meeting, and asking the hard questions about cost and consequences before voting, not after. Second, I am retired from full time work, so I have the time to do what the job actually requires: to study the agenda materials thoroughly, to attend committee meetings, and to help residents get their Town Hall concerns resolved. Third, I would measure every decision against what our existing neighbourhoods and infrastructure can support, not against what a developer proposes. Too many recent decisions have been made first and explained later. I would reverse that order.

Q2 - I have a question which of you have accepted money whether for performing services or as a gratuity from any developers or their related companies

None. I have never accepted money, gifts or favours from any developer or related company, for services or otherwise. I am seeking elected office for the first time and I spent my career as a CPA serving under strict professional rules of ethical conduct that require independence and the avoidance of conflicts of interest. We need to restore trust in the independence and integrity of our council. To be specific: I have no business or personal relationships with developers; own no real estate other than my own home; I do not hold a real estate sales license; and neither I nor any relatives are employed in or operate a business in the development, real estate, wine, agriculture, hospitality or tourism industry sectors. I would never accept money from any party to influence my vote, and I would step aside from any council matter where even the appearance of a conflict existed.

Q3 - Several studies that the Town initiated identified major gaps in planned investment vs actual funds available particularly gaps in infrastructure funding. What steps will you take to find the required funds

As an accountant, my starting point is simple: the Town should not approve capital plans it has no realistic way to fund. Closing the gap means growth paying for growth, visitors paying their fair share, and tighter discipline on our own spending. Specifically, I would:

- (I) Raise the town development charges on new construction in NOTL to the highest level in the Niagara region, so that growth pays for growth, with exemptions for affordable homes and seniors residences. This would offset the coming reduction in regional development charges under the Canada-Ontario Development Charge Reduction Program, which otherwise shifts infrastructure costs from developers to taxpayers. I would also apply development charges to underground parking structures attached to commercial properties, which have escaped them.
- (II) Ensure that unhosted short-term rentals owned by non-residents are taxed and licensed as the commercial businesses they are — through

higher licensing fees set by the Town, and by pressing MPAC and the Province to assess them in the commercial property class rather than as residences.

(III) Increase the municipal accommodation tax rate by one percentage point for rooms costing \$200 a night or less and two points for rooms above that, so that the millions of visitors who use our roads, parking, water and sewers each year contribute directly to maintaining them, and press the Province to let the Town direct more of that revenue to infrastructure, rather than tourism marketing.

(IV) Put every dollar of new development-charge and visitor revenue into a dedicated infrastructure reserve, reported publicly each year, and use zero-based budgeting to find savings in the operating budget so that infrastructure is not funded by ever-higher residential taxes.

Q4 - What does “transparency” mean to you?

Transparency means residents can see how a decision was made, who voted which way, and why — without having to file a request or sit through every meeting to find out. In practice, I would:

- Require recorded votes on every motion at council and committee, with each member's vote published in the minutes — no more show-of-hands decisions that leave no record.
- Restore full cooperation between the Town's communications department and all local journalists, so that residents get answers through the press and not just through official releases.
- Set and publish Town service standards for freedom-of-information requests, with faster turnaround and a public log of requests and response times.
- Simplify the Town website so residents can find agendas, minutes, budgets and staff reports in a couple of clicks.
- Give each councillor a modest budget for a regular (for example, quarterly) report to residents, in print and online, so residents hear directly from the people they elected — not only from the Town's official channels.

Q5 - How would you describe your style of leadership?

Servant leadership: I see a councillor as working for residents, not over them. I lead by example — I do the homework, I show up prepared, I listen before I speak, and I say what I believe rather than what is convenient. I'm a team player, and I would rather build a consensus around the facts than win an argument. And I walk the talk: if I ask residents to trust me with a decision, I will be able to show them the reasoning behind it.

Q6 - What are the hallmarks of your personal code of conduct?

Honesty and integrity — I don't say one thing in the council chamber and another at the door. Hard work — read everything, show up prepared, and never vote on something I haven't studied. Do no harm — when in doubt, protect what we already have. Stay positive — disagree on the issue, never attack the person. Speak up — silence on a bad decision is a form of consent. Accept personal responsibility — I will own my votes and my mistakes.

Q7 - How do you remain informed of issues that affect the greater good and wellbeing of our town?

By doing the work. For the past two years I have attended every council and committee meeting, in person or by livestream, and read every agenda, staff report, consultant study and set of minutes that went with them. I have analyzed the Town's published financial statements and budgets line by line. I have met in person with the CAO and with many current councillors, and I have spoken or corresponded with the others. And, just as importantly, I talk with my neighbours, I follow the local press closely, and I listen to what residents say at the door. Being informed is not a campaign activity for me — it is how I have spent my retirement.

Q8 - What measures would you use to consult the voting public in order to reach consensus on major decisions, for example, on the future use of the old hospital site so that it serves the larger community?

Consultation has to happen before a decision is made, not after. I would reinstate a proper and active advisory committee structure at Town Hall, with seats for residents who bring genuine subject-matter expertise, and

give those committees the authority to strike working groups on specific issues, such as the old hospital site.

For a decision as significant as the old hospital site, I would want to see costed options put in front of residents — at live, interactive listening sessions in each part of town, not just Old Town — followed by a public report showing what residents said and how it changed the plan.

I would also use e-mail, the Town website and social media to reach residents who cannot attend in person, and I would report back through those same channels. Consensus is not everyone agreeing; it is everyone being able to see that they were heard.

Q9 - How often and for what reasons do you engage in person with individual unelected residents of the Town of Niagara on the Lake?

Every day. I believe a councillor should be talking with ordinary residents — homeowners and renters, in every village and neighbourhood of NOTL — as a matter of routine, to understand what is actually going on and to help get problems fixed. That is where I want my time to go. What I will not do is hold private, one-on-one meetings at the offices or homes of developers, builders or lobby groups seeking a decision from council. Anyone with business before council should make their case to the full council, in public and on the record, so that every resident hears the same pitch I do.

Q10 - As a rule, how soon after receiving a message from a NOTL resident do you respond to it?

Within 24 hours. I will personally acknowledge every message from a resident within a day, say what I intend to do about it, and give a realistic timeline for a full answer. If the matter is outside what a councillor can fix, I will say so plainly and point the resident to the person who can help.

Q11 - How would you approach deciding how to vote on issues of significance to residents of Niagara on the Lake?

Facts first, residents first. I favour a deliberate, fact-based approach that starts with genuine community consultation, weighs the staff and consultant advice against what residents are telling us, and tests every option against what our neighbourhoods and infrastructure can actually support. Initial decisions should be made with resident input, adjusted

based on resident feedback, and explained publicly — I will always be able to tell a resident why I voted the way I did.

Q11 - What three specific issues that affect the Town do you deem priorities to take action on?

- Growth. The pace, scale and character of new development must fit our existing neighbourhoods and must not outrun the roads, water and sewer capacity we actually have. Protecting what makes NOTL special is not anti-growth; it is growth on the Town's terms rather than the developer's.
- Taxation. Residential tax increases should be held at or below the rate of inflation. We can do that by rationalizing spending through zero-based budgeting, and by growing the revenue sources that do not land on residents' shoulders — visitor accommodation taxes, parking revenue and development charges.
- Infrastructure. Close the infrastructure deficit faster, starting with the basics that protect homes today: clean out ditches, culverts and stormwater ponds; introduce a Town subsidy to help residents install backwater valves so sewage stops backing up into basements; direct higher development charges into a dedicated infrastructure reserve; and lobby the Region, the Province and Ottawa to match our funds. Residents in St. Davids and elsewhere should not have to wait for the next flood to see action.

Q12 - What action would you be inclined to take on short-term rentals in NOTL?

Short-term rentals should serve residents, not replace them. I would: (1) stop issuing new short-term rental licences; (2) support the traditional, resident-hosted B&B model, which keeps homes occupied by residents and is a better alternative to building more hotels; (3) make unhosted, non-resident-owned STRs pay as the commercial businesses they are, through Town licensing fees and by pressing the Province and MPAC to assess them in the commercial property class; (4) enforce the rules we already have, add enforcement resources to shut down unlicensed operators, and tighten the rules on noisy backyard amenities such as hot tubs and fire pits; and (5) ensure unhosted STR licences are non-

transferable on sale, so that when an unhosted STR property changes hands it returns to the housing stock as a home for a resident.

Q13 - What strategies would you use to ensure that longtime Town of NOTL residents are fairly considered and able to continue living in the area if they wish to do so?

Our seniors should not have to leave the town they built to age with dignity. As a councillor I would work to identify sites within NOTL that could be reserved or redeveloped for seniors' residences and assisted living, and partner with the Region and the Province to get them built. I would push hard, with Niagara Health and the Province, for an urgent-care facility in town with diagnostic imaging and fracture-clinic services, so a fall does not mean a trip to St. Catharines or Niagara Falls. I would partner with community service groups and local charities on programs such as Meals on Wheels that help seniors live independently longer, and work with the Region on recruiting more personal support workers to serve homes in NOTL. Longtime residents also deserve a Town that keeps tax increases at or below inflation — affordability is part of being able to stay.

Q14 - How often do you shop in a Town of Niagara on the Lake supermarket or small business?

Several times a week. We do our grocery shopping at Phil's Your Independent Grocer and Foodland rather than driving to the big-box stores in Niagara Falls or St. Catharines, we buy our hardware and home supplies at Penner's in Virgil, and when we eat out it is at local cafés and restaurants. Shopping local is one of the simplest ways to protect what makes this town work. As a member of council I will also partner with our Chamber of Commerce to extend the local resident discounts offered by their members and other merchants.

Q15 - Have you ever been arrested for any reason, accused of fraud or offered a bribe?

No. Never — not arrested, never accused of fraud, and never offered a bribe