

June 26, 2023

TO: The Urban Design Committee, Town of Niagara on the Lake
C.C. The Clerk, Mark Iamarino, Denise Horne
Town of Niagara on the Lake
1593 Four Mile Creek Road
PO Box 100
Virgil, Ontario

**RE: Urban Design Committee Meeting, June 28, 2023, 5 pm
OPA-01-2023 & ZBA-01-2023
Parliament Oak, 325 King Street.**

Dear Members of the Urban Design Committee;

I am registering my objection to the development proposal for the Parliament Oak School site, which is completely incompatible with the surrounding neighbourhood, streetscapes and vistas that characterize the Old Town. It lies smack in the middle of a quiet residential area.

You have been asked to consider and provide comments on massing, scale and height, setbacks, landscaping, parking, circulation *and other matters related to urban design*. Based on your Terms of Reference, specifically your Purpose and Mandate, other matters of urban design include providing design advice on the “potential physical and aesthetic impact of proposed buildings, structures . . .to the community’s public realm, including an evaluation of its relationship to the site and its surrounding character. . . .and general matters related to urban design”.

Under Scope of Work, it is stated that the “primary role of the Committee is to assist Staff in interpreting policy for specific sites and projects, as well as to define areas of concern that need to be resolved.”

Commercial Use is not appropriate for this site, because it is completely surrounded by a low density, low rise established residential neighbourhood with which it cannot possibly be made compatible.

The developer has attempted to frame this proposal as “gentle intensification”. There is nothing gentle about it: it is a monstrous intrusion into the quiet residential life of the neighbourhood in which it would sit. This is a large scale, intensive and extensive commercial enterprise that consists of:

- 129 guest rooms

- conference and event spaces - one of the speakers for the developer at the Open house confirmed that the hotel could accommodate 2 weddings on any given day. With that comes live music and dancing and late night partying
- a large restaurant, lounge and bar area with an outdoor patio - capacity for 700 dining and lounge seats -
- a spa and associated retail

Plus there will have to be extensive staff support for all the elements of this enterprise:

- housekeeping
- restaurant, lounge, bar and patio
- events and conferences
- maintenance and laundry
- landscaping
- administration

An enormous amount of traffic, with attendant noise and lights will be generated by hotel guests, wedding guests, conference and event attendees, people dining out and staff. Surprisingly, there has been no traffic study. And one might wonder where everyone will park? The proposed parking falls 70 spaces short of what is required by the Town bylaw.

Furthermore, a commercial enterprise of this size and scale will have frequent and daily visits by a number of delivery trucks for supplies, food and beverages and these will be large, dangerous and noisy trucks that will be lumbering through our quiet residential streets. Not to mention garbage trucks and recycling trucks, and all of them will be turning into and backing out of the property via the otherwise quiet side streets of Gage and Centre that do not have sidewalks. These are noisy vehicles with their braking systems, back up alarms etc. I live on Centre Street and there is a lot of pedestrian traffic there heading toward Veterans' Memorial Park and the Commons.

One of the Goals and Objectives of Land Use Policies for Commercial uses in the Official Plan is "*to prevent the intrusion of commercial uses into residential areas*" (S.10.2.(8)). How can such a large scale, busy, noisy and traffic-generating commercial enterprise with such problematic parking be described as anything other than intrusive, and massively so? It is a far cry from gentle - it is an assault on the quiet character and privacy of the surrounding residential neighbourhood.

Another concern is Height, Massing and Scale. S. 6.4 of the OP outlines building height restrictions and directs that "*the Town consists of low-rise*

structures in a small town setting . . . Generally, the building height has not exceeded 11 metres (36 feet). For the most part, this low rise character should be maintained.” The zoning bylaw sets a maximum height of 10 metres.

S. 4.6 of the OP deals with Land Use Compatibility Policies and provides that *“Intensification and/or redevelopment should be consistent with: d) the existing and/or planned height and massing of buildings within the surrounding neighbourhood”*.

Furthermore, the Land Use Compatibility Policies found in 6A s.4(6) OP require that *“intensification and/or redevelopment should be consistent with the existing and/or planned built form of the surrounding neighbourhood, the existing and or planned densities and the existing height and massing of buildings within the surrounding neighbourhood (6A s.4.6(a)(c)(d)). 6A 4.6(f) requires that development proposals shall be compatible and integrate with the established character and heritage of the area. (see also s.4.5.2.1(f), s.4.7.2.1 of the OPR).*

This intensification proposal does not comply with the Urban Design Guidelines that apply to the Old Town in that *the bulk, mass and scale of the proposal do not fit the context within which it is located* (see Urban Design Guideline (d) in s.6A 4.4 of the OP).

A hotel 62 feet high (19.2 metres) simply does not fit with the surrounding neighbourhood. It is described in the application as 4 storeys high. But it is the *actual* height that really matters. The first storey alone is 20 feet! In reality, in terms of height (62 feet), its impact is more like that of a 6 storey building in a low rise 1 to 2 storey neighbourhood. The proposed hotel would tower over that neighbourhood.

If members of the Committee have not had the opportunity to read two recent Letters to the Editor in local papers, with input from respected architects and planners, I would urge you to review the following:

“Parliament Oak hotel height would set dangerous precedent”, The Lake Report, June 22, 2023 at p. 10. <https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/80918cb8-76d5-4cb4-902d-b164080ed0bc/THELAKEREPORT-June22-2023-forweb.pdf>

“Illustration: Parliament Oak hotel compared to Prince of Wales”, The Lake Report, June 1, 2023, at p.9. <https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/80918cb8-76d5-4cb4-902d-b164080ed0bc/downloads/THELAKEREPORT-June1-2023-forweb3.pdf?ver=1687544578331>

In Conclusion:

Council and staff are responsible for giving effect to the vision and values of our Official Plan and Official Plan Review and to provide for growth or intensification in appropriate forms and areas in order to preserve the unique history, culture and character of this special town which has been centuries in the making. This proposal would significantly and permanently damage it. If this proposal moves forward, it would set a very dangerous precedent. Growth is inevitable and desirable, but erosion and destruction of our community is not.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Bartlett
12 Centre Street

Notes:

The Official Plan (OP) and the Official Plan Review (OPR) recognize the unique character and atmosphere of the Old Town of Niagara on the Lake, and the need to protect and enhance it. Several years of planning studies, public meetings and a great deal of effort was spent to develop these important frameworks for future development.

The OP in section 15 recognizes that certain institutional uses that serve the local community, such as a school, may cease operation. In those circumstances, the only permitted change of land use is to low density residential, subject to a site specific zoning by-law amendment . Other sections of the Official Plan recognize that any redevelopment must achieve a harmonious design, integrate with and not negatively impact the well established, low rise residential character of the Old Town. New development must be consistent with this character.

One of the Goals and Objectives of the Commercial Designation, is to prevent the *intrusion* of commercial use into residential areas (S.10.2.(8)) and also to minimize the impact of commercial development on adjacent land uses.

It is NOT intended that certain existing large tourist-serving commercial establishments within the Old Town (such as the Pillar and Post, Prince of Wales, Oban inn and Charles Inn) form nodes for expanded Commercial development. (s.10.3.1(3)).