



## Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

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**REPORT #:** CAO-24-042      **COMMITTEE DATE:** 2024-11-19  
**REPORT TO:** COTW-General      **DUE IN COUNCIL:** 2024-11-26  
**SUBJECT:** Former Hospital Site (176 Wellington Street) – Public Engagement

### 1. RECOMMENDATION

It is respectfully recommended that:

- 1.1 Council direct staff to procure external services to conduct a public engagement on the redevelopment of the former hospital site at 176 Wellington Street, with funding in the amount of \$85,000 sourced from parking revenue; and,
- 1.2 Council authorize staff to undertake the necessary actions to proceed with the public engagement process.

### 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The former hospital site at 176 Wellington Street is a central parcel of property situated at the northeast corner of Wellington and Picton Streets in Old Town. Future development of this site will have a significant impact on the character, functionality and liveability of the surrounding area.
- Purchased by the Town after being declared surplus, the 2017 Official Plan designates the site as Open Space and Community Facilities, with zoning as Institutional under By-law 4316-09, Section 7.10.
- Archaeological assessments confirm no further investigation of the property is needed.
- The site currently hosts Niagara Regional EMS and leases space to a school, a massage therapist, and a telecommunication tower.
- Initial public engagement in 2018 involved a staff-led online idea board limited to registered users on the Town's "Join the Conversation" (JTC) platform. Modest feedback was received (45 idea submissions, 249 votes, and over 1,000 visits to the ideas page).
- A Hospital Site RFEI/RFP process was conducted in 2022, and Optimus SBR Inc. was appointed as the fairness monitor.
- Nine proposals were received but rejected by Council due to unmet strategic objectives and post-COVID-19 economic changes. The process was cancelled.
- Future plans were deferred to the newly elected Council in January 2023, with no further action taken to-date.
- To gather broader community input on the future use of the site and community amenity needs more broadly, a comprehensive re-engagement effort is suggested with the assistance of external services.
- Enhanced engagement options, including open houses, online surveys, and community forums are proposed. Results will be reported to Council, and feedback will guide a draft plan, ensuring alignment with the Council's Strategic Plan to complete planning by Q4 2025.
- The Burton Foundation recently undertook a community phone survey on a proposal for a specific future use of the hospital site. The results of this survey will be included as an input to other public feedback collected as part of the Town's broader public consultation for

Council's consideration.

### **3. PURPOSE**

This report outlines options for public engagement regarding the former hospital site.

### **4. BACKGROUND**

The property at 176 Wellington Street, situated at the northeast corner of Wellington and Picton Streets in Old Town, Niagara-on-the-Lake, has long held a prominent role in the community, historically serving as a hospital, nurse's residence, hospice, and various medical offices.

The timeline below highlights the key events and decisions regarding the former hospital site:

#### **2017:**

- Niagara Health Services declared the property surplus, prompting the Town's interest in acquiring it for potential future community use.
- Council approved By-law 4958-17, authorizing the purchase of 176 Wellington Street for \$3.6 million from Niagara Health Services.
- A Council sub-committee was formed to explore a public process for the property.

#### **2018:**

- Council approved a \$3.5 million funding strategy through the Town's Development Charges for the property purchase (**Report CS-18-014, Appendix I**).
- The Town formally assumed occupancy of the site.
- Public engagement began through the JTC platform, with 45 idea submissions, 249 votes, and over 1,000 visits to the ideas page. No further action was taken based on this feedback (**Information Report, Appendix 2**).

#### **2019:**

- Detritus Consulting Ltd. completed an archaeological assessment, confirming no further investigation was needed.

#### **2020:**

- Council established a Hospital Site Steering Committee to advise on site planning and public engagement (**Report CS-20-002, Appendix 3**).

#### **2021:**

- Council received a presentation on the Hospital Site Request for Expression of Interest (RFEI) and approved up to \$25,000 for a fairness monitor to oversee the RFEI/RFP process, funded from the Capital Reserve.

#### **2022:**

- The Town engaged Optimus SBR Inc. as the Fairness Advisor for the RFEI process.
- Nine proposals were received; however, Council rejected all proposals due to unmet strategic objectives and post-COVID-19 economic changes, deciding to cancel the process without proceeding to detailed proposals.
- It was determined that future plans for the site would be revisited by the newly elected Council in January 2023. Nothing further has taken place to date.

### **Financial Summary**

Since the acquisition of 176 Wellington Street, the Town has been required to pay an annual interest of \$61,162 on the borrowed Development Charges, which are held in reserve. No principal payments have been made on the internal borrowing thus far. Should the Town eventually sell the property, proceeds would first be used to repay the Development Charges

Reserve, with any surplus directed to other Town reserves. If the property is retained for development, alternative options for repaying the balance will need to be explored.

Below is a summary of the property's revenue and expenses since its acquisition:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Revenues</b>	<b>Expenses</b>	<b>Net Income/ (Net Loss)</b>
<b>2018</b>	47,048	88,688	(41,640)
<b>2019</b>	140,861	187,704	(46,843)
<b>2020</b>	122,346	174,400	(52,054)
<b>2021</b>	128,172	184,081	(55,909)
<b>2022</b>	149,510	176,378	(26,868)
<b>2023</b>	60,524*	191,935	(131,411)
<b>2024 (YTD 2024-10-15)</b>	31,671	58,084	(26,413)
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>680,131</b>	<b>1,061,270</b>	<b>(381,138)</b>

\*The significant revenue decrease from 2022 to 2023 is due to a loss in rental with the move of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Family Health Team.

This summary highlights the ongoing financial commitment associated with maintaining the property and the need for a clear direction on its future use to ensure fiscal responsibility and alignment with community priorities.

**5. DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS**

Thoughtful redevelopment of the site offers a rare opportunity to establish a lasting legacy that reflects community values and enriches Old Town's cultural and social landscape. Past engagement may have been limited due to the structure and scope of the 2018 approach. Conducted exclusively online via the JTC platform, participation required user registration, likely deterring casual input and restricting feedback to a smaller, pre-existing audience. The engagement was limited to an "idea board," allowing for submissions and votes but lacking a comprehensive survey or in-person options that could have drawn broader perspectives. These limitations resulted in modest metrics, 45 ideas, 249 votes, and just over 1,000-page visits, yielding feedback insufficient to guide future decisions.

Without a comprehensive public engagement process, the Town risks community dissatisfaction, under-utilization of the site, and potential misalignment with Council's strategic goals. To better capture community input, future engagement should be more inclusive, combining online and in-person opportunities, removing registration barriers, and incorporating surveys and focus groups to capture a fuller range of resident opinions and priorities. These enhancements will help ensure that decisions reflect a well-rounded and representative community vision for this historic property.

In alignment with Council's Strategic Plan, developing a plan for the former hospital site must be complete by Q4 of 2025. Staff wish to begin this process to ensure that this target date is met.

The results from the Town's outreach, as well as a phone survey conducted in the community by the James A. Burton & Family Foundation, will be presented to Council for consideration during the decision-making process regarding the future use of the property.

## 6. STRATEGIC PLAN

The content of this report supports the following Strategic Plan initiatives:

### Pillar

3. Enrich Community Assets, Environment, & Infrastructure

### Priority

3.3 Infrastructure

### Action

3.3 a) Infrastructure Investment (Physical & Green)

## 7. OPTIONS

7.1 **External Consultant:** Hiring an external consultant would ensure specialized expertise in conducting public engagement, including broad community outreach, enhanced promotional strategies, and varied engagement channels. The consultant-led process will work towards achieving high engagement rates similar to the Parks & Recreation Masterplan engagement process and will use a mix of open houses, online surveys, and community forums. This option would require \$85,000, sourced from parking reserves, to support extensive outreach efforts and ensure high-quality input. **(Recommended)**

**Proposed Timeline and Outreach Plan:** If approved, staff plan to begin hiring consultants in 2024, with a public engagement project launch in Q1 of 2025. The outreach strategy will feature multiple engagement opportunities, including, but not limited to, online feedback (such as surveys, idea boards, and comment sections), in-person engagement (such as open houses, community workshops, and forums), and printed materials.

7.2 **In-House Engagement:** An in-house approach would include an online survey, in-person open houses, and/or public information centers, with promotion of all efforts. Staff would review and analyze feedback, then provide a summary report to Council. Engagement could begin in Q1 of 2025, with a report to Council in late Q1 of 2025. While cost-effective and offering greater control, this option would require significant staff time and could delay other projects, as noted above. **(Not Recommended)**

## 8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The consultant approach (Option 7.1) requires a dedicated budget of \$85,000 sourced from parking reserves. This funding will cover consultant fees for a comprehensive public engagement strategy, ensuring resources are in place for targeted outreach, specialized engagement methods, and expert analysis. In comparison, the in-house option (Option 7.2) would be more cost-effective but would require significant staff time, potentially impacting timelines and the scope of engagement due to limited resources.

## 9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no significant environmental impacts associated with this public engagement process.

## 10. COMMUNICATIONS

A comprehensive communication plan will support the engagement process. Staff will maximize outreach to ensure high community participation by promoting the engagement through:

- **News Releases:** Distributed to local and regional news outlets to announce the engagement opportunity.
- **Newspaper Advertisements:** In local publications to reach residents who may not be active online.
- **Digital Board Advertisements:** Located in high-traffic areas to increase visibility.
- **Social Media Posts:** Regular posts on the Town's social media channels to reach a broad audience.
- **Website Updates:** Dedicated sections on the Town's website to provide ongoing information about engagement events and opportunities.

Through these communication methods, staff will work to build awareness and ensure residents have multiple opportunities to participate in shaping the future of this important site.

## 11. CONCLUSION

Upon Council's approval, staff will begin implementing the selected engagement approach, with the ultimate goal of gathering meaningful public input to guide Council's next steps. This engagement will ensure a transparent, inclusive, and community-driven process that will lay the foundation for a project that supports Council's Strategic Plan and the vision of Niagara-on-the-Lake's residents.

## 12. APPENDICES

- Appendix I – Report CS-18-014
- Appendix II – Information Report
- Appendix III– Report CS-20-002

Respectfully submitted:

**Prepared by:**



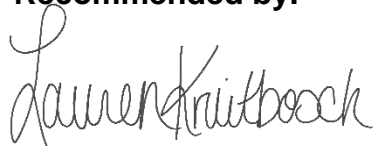
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