



# **Official Plan Update Public Engagement Summary**

**Public Information Centres and Online Survey Results**



## Public Information Centres

**Thursday, March 27, 2025, and Tuesday, April 1, 2025**

Public Information Centre sessions were held in Old Town and St. David's on Thursday, March 27, 2025, and Tuesday, April 1, 2025. The intent of the Public Information Centre sessions was to provide an opportunity for the public to learn more, ask questions, and provide input on the scope of review for the Official Plan update.

Participants were invited to review display boards and provide feedback on specific Official Plan related questions using sticky notes. The feedback provided is summarized, as outlined below:

- Address growth management and population growth projections
- Increased diversity of types and forms of housing
- Address concerns of building heights
- Clarity on additional dwelling unit permissions in rural lands
- Improve shoreline protection
- Direction on climate change policies
- More of a focus on parking, transportation, and active transportation
- Protection of agricultural land and clarity on agriculture-related uses
- Connectivity between watersheds and settlement areas
- Integration of the Draft Parks and Recreation Master Plan
- Chantauqua neighbourhood

Town staff have recorded the feedback received from the Public Information Centres.

## Official Plan Update Survey Results

**March 19 – April 16, 2025 | 179 Responses**

**Q1: What is your connection to the Town? (Select all that apply)**

*\*Mandatory question: 179 responses.*

Response	Percentage of Respondents
Resident	86.6%
Business Owner	12.8%
Property Owner	30.2%
Developer	1.7%
Visitor	5.0%
Other (please specify)	6.7%

Other responses included Town Councillor, work in Town, Town Staff, farmer, etc.

**Q2: How long have you lived in the municipality?**

*\*Mandatory question: 179 responses.*

Response	Percentage of Respondents
Less than 1 year	2.2%
1-5 years	19.0%
6-10 years	13.4%
11-15 years	21.8%
16-20 years	11.2%
20+ years	26.3%
I do not live in the municipality.	6.1%

**Q3: What is your age group?**

*\*Mandatory question: 179 responses.*

Response	Percentage of Respondents
18-24	0%
25-34	11.2%
35-44	12.8%
45-54	14.0%
55-64	20.7%
65-74	21.2%
75+	20.1%

**Q4: How familiar are you with the Town's adopted 2019 Official Plan?**

*\*Mandatory question: 179 responses.*

Response	Percentage of Respondents
Very familiar	14.0%
Somewhat familiar	58.1%
Not familiar	27.9%

**Q5: The adopted 2019 Official Plan contains the following Community Vision: Niagara-on-the-Lake is a fiercely independent, economically empowered Town offering a rich tapestry of recreational, historical, cultural, and educational opportunities, public green spaces and a uniquely valuable agricultural area. Our stunning landscape offers a rich experience where the journey equals the destination. We are a community for everyone. We are a resilient, distinctive and dynamic Town in which to live, work and learn. Through responsible stewardship we preserve the balance of values that makes us a world-class destination. Although we dream big, we stay true to our small-Town roots. Do you think the Vision Statement still reflects the priorities of the community?**

*\*Mandatory question: 179 responses.*

Response	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	41.9%
No, it needs updating	38.5%
Unsure	8.9%
Other (please specify)	10.6%

Other responses included concerns that the vision doesn't stay true to small-town roots. Some felt the vision doesn't need updating, but rather stronger alignment with existing values. A few questioned whether we are truly a "community for everyone," and others suggested the vision statement is too long, too general, or could better reflect the Town's historic character. Most comments were anecdotal in nature.

**Q6: The adopted 2019 Official Plan contains the following strategic pillars to guide the implementation of the Community Vision. Do you think these pillars still reflect the priorities of the community?**

- A prosperous and diverse economy.
- Strong environmental stewardship.
- An inclusive, integrated, healthy town.
- A centre for culture, heritage and recreation.
- Mobility choices.
- A well-planned built environment.
- A prosperous and sustainable agriculture sector.
- Well-managed municipal finances.

*\*Mandatory question: 179 responses.*

Response	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	44.1%
No, they need updating	40.2%
Unsure	7.3%
Other (please specify)	8.4%

Other responses included to mention tourism, families/youth, transportation, protecting heritage, a high-standard road network, and to remove inclusivity and environmental concerns. Some note that there are too many pillars. Most comments were anecdotal in nature.

**Q7: In your opinion, how well does the Town's adopted 2019 Official Plan address the following areas?**

*\*Mandatory question: 179 responses.*

Response	Number of Respondents				
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	I don't know
Planning for housing to meet the needs of residents	11	31	57	64	16
Supporting the Town's agricultural and tourism economy	20	81	49	19	10
Planning for transportation and infrastructure	9	26	51	81	12
Protecting the environment and addressing climate change	12	39	60	44	24
Protecting the Town's heritage character and preserving its history	26	51	47	47	8
Providing parks, recreation, and public spaces	28	62	51	29	9
Managing growth	7	32	58	68	14

**Q8: Which policies or priorities within the Town's adopted 2019 Official Plan should be carried forward into the updated Plan?**

*\*Optional question: 57 responses.*

Responses were analyzed to find the top three themes that emerged from the data:

- **Heritage Preservation (18 mentions):** Calls to protect historic buildings, preserve the Town's heritage and character, and retain small-town charm. Respondents emphasized the importance of aligning future developments with Niagara-on-the-Lake's historical identity and maintaining the integrity of residential areas.
- **Environmental Stewardship and Green Space Preservation (14 mentions):**

Respondents expressed strong support for protecting natural landscapes, agricultural lands, and green space. There was also concern about environmental impacts from new developments and a need for environmental responsibility.

- **Growth Management and Housing Concerns (13 mentions):** Participants shared concerns around how growth is unfolding in the community. Key themes included the importance of careful planning, addressing infrastructure needs, improving housing affordability, and maintaining the balance between growth and quality of life. Many emphasized the need to ensure that future development reflects the Town's character and is supported by the right infrastructure.

**Q9: What aspects of the Town's adopted 2019 Official Plan do you think need improvement or revision?**

*\*Optional question: 71 responses.*

Responses were analyzed to find the top three themes that emerged from the data:

- **Growth and Housing Management (24 mentions):** Respondents expressed concerns about the pace, type, and quality of housing developments. There is strong support for affordable housing, senior housing, and controlled growth that respects the Town's character. Some also highlighted a desire to protect against overdevelopment and ensure infrastructure can support new builds.
- **Heritage Protection and Town Character (18 mentions):** Comments included the need to enforce architectural controls, maintain historic charm, and prevent developments that would erode the Town's identity, especially in Old Town and designated heritage districts.
- **Environmental Stewardship and Infrastructure Planning (14 mentions):** Respondents called for sustainable development, environmental protection, and infrastructure upgrades, particularly in transportation, mobility, and public spaces. Some participants expressed concerns about preserving green space and environmentally friendly policies.

**Q10: As Niagara-on-the-Lake grows, what do you feel should be the three key areas of focus?**

*\*Mandatory question: 179 responses.*

Response	Percentage of Respondents
Protecting natural areas & agricultural land	60.3%
Supporting economic development & local businesses	38.5%
Enhancing parks & recreational spaces	37.4%
Improving transportation & public transit	42.5%
Increasing housing supply & affordability	38.5%
Strengthening the heritage conservation	43.0%
Enhancing the tourism economy	16.2%
Other (please specify)	8.9%

Other comments included parking, sidewalks, climate change adaptation and mitigation requirements, maintenance policies, contextual zoning, daycare and schools, urban design review, small local business expansion, senior housing, growth management, and enhanced residential development.

**Q11: What current or new challenges or opportunities should be addressed in the Town's updated Official Plan? (Select all that apply)**

*Mandatory question: 179 responses*

Response	Percentage of Respondents
Addressing housing affordability & supply	50.3%
Managing population growth & development responsibly	73.7%
Improving public transportation & walkability	55.3%
Enhancing environmental sustainability & climate resilience	45.3%
Strengthening heritage preservation & cultural spaces	56.4%
Other (please specify)	6.1%

**Q12: Is there anything from the adopted 2019 Official Plan that you feel was overlooked or not effectively addressed?**

*Optional question: 46 responses*

Responses were analyzed to find the top three themes that emerged from the data:

- **Transportation and Active Mobility Infrastructure (16 mentions):** Respondents expressed concerns around inadequate parking, especially in Old Town, as well as a lack of sidewalks, bike lanes, and public transportation. There was a strong emphasis on enhancing infrastructure for pedestrian safety, bike accessibility, and alternative mobility options to cars, particularly in areas such as Virgil, Niagara Stone Road, and the Glendale area.
- **Development Control and Planning Compliance (14 mentions):** Several participants shared concerns about the pace and nature of development in the community. Feedback highlighted a desire for more consistent zoning decisions, greater transparency, and stronger enforcement of planning regulations. There was emphasis on the importance of aligning development with the Town's Official Plan, ensuring timely project delivery, preserving the community's character and long-term vision, and thoughtful approaches to rezoning that support planning goals.
- **Heritage and Community Character Preservation (9 mentions):** Respondents emphasized the need to protect the Town's heritage, including historic character, architecture, and neighbourhood aesthetics. There was concern that certain developments are compromising what makes Niagara-on-the-Lake unique, especially in Old Town, St. Davids, and Queenston. Specific requests were made for clearer design guidelines and character protections.

**Q13: If any, what changes would you like to see in the new Official Plan?**

*Optional question: 53 responses*

Responses were analyzed to find the top three themes that emerged from the data:

- **Preservation of Heritage, Agriculture, and Community Character (17 mentions):** Respondents emphasized the need to preserve Niagara-on-the-Lake's heritage assets, agricultural lands, and small-town charm. Some shared concerns about the impact of larger-scale developments, the pressures of tourism, and the need for stronger enforcement of heritage protections. There was also a desire for clearer planning guidelines to help safeguard historic properties and maintain the community's rural character.
- **Parks, Recreation, and Family-Friendly Amenities (15 mentions):** Strong support for enhanced parks and recreation facilities, including indoor swimming pools, updated playgrounds, walking trails, and public gathering spaces. Respondents highlighted a lack of accessible, family-oriented facilities and called for more inclusive planning to support the well-being of children, seniors, and the broader community.
- **Public Transportation and Infrastructure Improvements (14 mentions):** Comments focused on the need for better public transportation, sidewalks, cycling infrastructure, and road upgrades. Respondents want improved mobility options within and between the settlement areas, as well as infrastructure that matches the needs of a growing and aging population.

**Q14: Imagine 10 years from now—what do you hope has changed or improved in Niagara-on-the-Lake?**

*Optional question: 117 responses*

Responses were analyzed to find the top three themes that emerged from the data:

- **Housing Affordability and Senior Living Options (30 mentions):** Respondents emphasized the need for affordable housing, particularly to retain families, support young professionals, and ensure aging residents can remain in the community. Comments also highlighted a lack of rental options and retirement housing, as well as concerns that the Town is becoming unaffordable due to perceived development patterns.
- **Transportation, Walkability, and Infrastructure (27 mentions):** Comments called for better public transportation, sidewalks, bike paths, and road upgrades. The desire for a walkable, accessible community was clear, along with demands for expanded transit connections, pedestrianized areas (like Queen Street), and reduced traffic congestion due to tourism.
- **Heritage and Community Character Preservation (24 mentions):** Respondents expressed strong concern for perceived overdevelopment, especially in Old Town and heritage districts. Many feared the Town's historic charm and rural identity are being eroded by large-scale developments and tourism. Protection of the tree canopy, historic architecture, and green spaces was frequently mentioned.

**Q15: What's the single biggest priority the Official Plan should focus on for the future of Niagara-on-the-Lake?**

*Optional question: 100 responses*

Responses were analyzed to find the top three themes that emerged from the data:



- **Controlled and Responsible Growth Management (48 mentions):** Respondents voiced strong concerns about perceived overdevelopment, particularly in heritage areas and agricultural lands. There were consistent calls for smart growth, respecting the Official Plan, implementing clear Zoning By-laws, and ensuring infrastructure capacity aligns with population increases. While some support targeted growth in certain areas (e.g., Glendale), the consensus was that growth must be community-first, sustainable, and not developer-driven.
- **Heritage and Agricultural Land Preservation (37 mentions):** Respondents want to preserve Niagara-on-the-Lake's historic character, natural beauty, and agricultural heritage. Feedback reflected a deep appreciation for what makes the Town unique, along with concerns that growth and commercial pressures could impact these valued qualities. There is strong support for protecting heritage buildings, safeguarding farmland, and ensuring that the Town's small-town charm continues to be a defining feature of the community.
- **Infrastructure and Public Services (Including Housing Affordability) (33 mentions):** Infrastructure needs, particularly roads, drainage, transportation, and sidewalks, were mentioned. Additionally, there is a growing demand for affordable and diverse housing, particularly for seniors, young families, and workers in the hospitality and agriculture sectors. Respondents emphasized the importance of planning growth to meet service capacity and avoiding developments that strain existing infrastructure.

**Q16: Do you have any additional comments or suggestions for the Official Plan?**

*Optional question: 56 responses*

Responses were analyzed to find the top three themes that emerged from the data:

- **Finalize the Official Plan and Improve Public Engagement (27 mentions):** Some participants shared a desire to see more timely progress on updating the Official Plan, along with a call for more transparent and meaningful public consultation. Suggestions included finding ways to better engage younger residents, offering more interactive opportunities for input, and clearly showing how community feedback is being reflected in the process.
- **Protect Heritage, Community Character, and Agricultural Lands (25 mentions):** A theme that emerged was the importance of preserving Niagara-on-the-Lake's historic charm, agricultural roots, and unique identity. Respondents expressed a desire to ensure that future development aligns with the Town's distinct character and doesn't begin to feel like more urbanized areas. There was also clear support for protecting the tree canopy, heritage properties, and valuable farmland as essential parts of what makes the community special.
- **Balance Tourism with Local Needs (20 mentions):** Respondents emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance between supporting tourism and enhancing residents' quality of life. Suggestions included placing more focus on community needs, such as affordable housing, infrastructure improvements, and support for local businesses. Some also recommended thoughtful approaches to managing hotel growth, expanding transit options for workers, and ensuring that planning decisions continue to prioritize the needs of residents.