

Niagara Regional Police investigating cash exchange between developer and NOTL town councillor

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

Niagara Regional Police are investigating after prominent developer Benny Marotta gave Coun. Gary Burroughs an envelope containing \$10,000 in cash on March 11.

Initially, Town of NOTL chief administrator Marnie Cluckie contacted the Ontario Provincial Police to investigate, but they referred her to the regional force.

“The Niagara Regional Police Service was con-

tacted on Wednesday, March 22, 2023 regarding a contribution investigation,” police spokesperson Stephanie Sabourin said in an email response to questions from The Lake Report.

“As investigation remains on-going, with no criminal charges laid at this time, we are unable to share further information.”

Police did not answer questions asking them to clarify what a “contribution investigation” entails or what potential crime is being investigated.

The Town of NOTL voted in a private meeting on March 20 to ask police to look into the matter, after a concerned Burroughs brought the money to the town’s chief administrator on March 13.

Council asked that the information be taken to the OPP.

However, Cluckie said the OPP told her to take the matter to Niagara police.

“While it was originally brought to the attention of the OPP, the OPP redirected the town to the Niagara Regional Police Service,”

Cluckie said in an email.

“A reason for redirecting was not given,” she said.

Neither the town nor police have named Marotta or Burroughs or provided details of the incident.

The town put out a news release last Wednesday, shortly after The Lake Report published a story online about the exchange.

The release said the town took immediate action to contact police and the town’s integrity commissioner after being directed to do so during the private meeting.

Friends of the Forgotten get green light to care for NOTL’s Black burial ground

Somer Slobodian
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

NOTL resident George Webber and chief administrative officer Marnie Cluckie stood before town council last Tuesday night to introduce the Friends of the Forgotten and seek councillors’ support.

Webber’s group is focused on improving and bringing attention to NOTL’s inactive cemeteries — starting with the Niagara Baptist Church Burial Ground.

The town maintains one active cemetery and 11 inactive cemeteries, Cluckie told council.

Taking care of these sites is hard for municipalities with little funding and resources, she explained.

The town partnered with West Lincoln and the Town of Lincoln in 2022 to ask the Association of Municipalities of Ontario to press the provincial government to help smaller, rural municipalities fund inactive cemeteries.

It’s difficult for municipalities to “bear the cost of the abandoned cemeteries and that can become a burden to already-overburdened taxpayers,” Cluckie said.

“Fortunately for us, we have some passionate individuals in the town who are dedicated residents and volunteers who want to make a



George Webber asks the council to support the Friends of the Forgotten and their effort to restore the Niagara Baptist Church Burial Ground. EVAN LOREE

difference,” she said.

Webber and the Friends of the Forgotten have been working with the town to bring this project to life throughout the past year and March 21 was the first time the group made a presentation to council.

The project started with the Niagara Baptist Church Burial Ground, formerly known as the Negro Burial Ground, on Mississagua Street near Mary Street.

“We want to transform the current unremarkable state of that site into something we can all take pride in,” said Webber.

Members of the Friends of the Forgotten are doing extensive research to find out who is buried there.

They have the names of about 15 people whose graves might be on the

property.

“We want to honour the parishioners, both white and Black, who are currently buried at the site,” Webber said.

The group has raised more than \$5,000, enough to conduct a stage one archeological assessment on the grounds.

The money is being collected through the town and everything has been done with the town’s approval.

The current focus is on the Black burial ground, however, Webber explained the group’s mission has grown.

Its members want to offer respect, care and attention to all of the inactive cemeteries in NOTL.

“Why should we only pay attention to one site when there are 11 sites in town

that need attention?” he said.

“When we look at all of them, we improve our entire community,” he added.

Webber asked council for support of the Friends of the Forgotten in principle and be invited back to share the archeological report when it’s completed.

Council unanimously supported Webber’s requests, meaning the group can begin publicly fundraising.

Webber told The Lake Report the team will be coming up with a fundraising plan as well as looking for lead donors and volunteer grant writers.

“We want to be a template, we want to be a leader, we want to be a role model for others who may want to develop the other sites within our town,” Webber said.

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