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## ANALYSIS

# Council responses to questions about relationships

Kevin MacLean  
The Lake Report

In the aftermath of a controversial incident in which a developer gave a town councillor an envelope containing \$10,000 in cash, The Lake Report posed a detailed series of questions to all members of Niagara-on-the-Lake council and regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser about their relationships and interactions with people and companies.

Under normal circumstances, such questions might be considered extremely intrusive, but given that councillors are elected to represent the public – and in the interests of accountability and transparency – we felt the questions were valid and fair.

On March 25, we sent the questions to all NOTL’s elected municipal officials and asked for responses by March 31.

After some discussion among town councillors and the mayor, they decided Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa would respond on behalf of all council members, but that individual councillors were free to submit their own comments if they wished.

Some councillors opted to answer and some did not. In most instances, the responses were very general and many did not

answer the specific questions posed.

Immediately after receiving the mayor’s response on behalf of council on March 30, we thanked him for his submission but advised that it didn’t deal with the specifics of the questions. No further response was received from him.

Here are the questions we asked of council members:

1. Do you have a personal, private or business

relationship with anyone or any company that has or may have business before the Town of NOTL? Please provide details, briefly.

2. Have you ever met privately with any person (including developers) having business with the Town of NOTL, discussed town matters with them in a venue other than a council or committee meeting? Who and why?

3. In your time as a coun-

cillor, have you ever declared a conflict of interest due to a personal, business or professional relationship you have with anyone or any company that has or may have business before the Town of NOTL? Please provide details, briefly.

4. Is there anything else that residents of NOTL should know about any of your interactions or relationships in your capacity as an elected member of council?



Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa.



Deputy Mayor Erwin Wiens.



Tim Balasiuk.



Gary Burroughs.



Wendy Cheropita.



Maria Mavridis.



Sandra O'Connor.



Nick Ruller.



Adriana Vizzari.

**W**ith the mayor responding to our questions on behalf of council, regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser and town Coun. Tim Balasiuk didn’t submit responses. Coun. Wendy Cheropita said she was content with the mayor’s response. Coun. Maria Mavridis posted comments on her public blog and we have included the relevant information below.

As well, information about gifts and other benefits accepted by councillors is posted under “Disclosures and Conflict of Interest” on the town’s website.

Here are the answers received to our questions.

**Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa**

Thank you for the role local media such as The Lake Report has in our community. The benefits of a local, diligent, well-resourced news media are strongly supported.

As lord mayor, I have chosen to respond on behalf of members of council. Should members of council wish to respond individually that is up to their discretion.

Members of council are residents and elected officials of Niagara-on-the-Lake, representing over 18,000 people. As members of the community, we have many relationships and a broad range of interactions with many residents, businesses, and community organizations.

As lord mayor, I meet with all of the above regularly regarding matters of public interest. This was true for my schedule while I was both a town and regional councillor. I expect that most members of council would share a similar experience.

Each member of council has a personal obligation to ensure that they act in compliance with all laws, the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act and the code of conduct. We take this responsibility very seriously.

I have declared a conflict in several matters over my 10-plus years as an elected council member.

I will not review or list those individual occurrences, as they are a matter of

public record and available for any person to review. This fact would be the same for members of council as well.

Obviously, there will be variations amongst council members depending on duration of their terms.

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**Coun. Erwin Wiens**  
**Deputy lord mayor**

Members of council are residents and elected officials of Niagara-on-the-Lake, a town of over 18,000 people.

Growing up in Niagara-on-the-Lake, raising a family, being a second-generation farmer, volunteering with many organizations and a council member, it is expected that I, like my colleagues, would have many

relationships and a broad range of interactions with many residents, organizations and businesses in the community.

Each member of council has a personal obligation to ensure that they act in compliance with all laws, the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act and the code of conduct.

As a councillor, I take this responsibility seriously. All declared conflicts are a matter of public record and available for review.

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**Coun. Gary Burroughs**

I did meet with a developer on March 4, (not March 11), at his request at Two Sisters. That meeting is currently under review by Niagara Regional Police so

no further comment.

In general, I am happy to meet with any resident at their request to discuss issues they have. Typically, we either meet at Tim Hortons or the NOTL Community Centre. I buy my own coffee. These meetings usually take up to an hour. Rarely is anyone else in attendance.

I have been involved with many groups over the years, as far back as chairing the Shaw Festival in 1982-83, and the Niagara Foundation where I was a board member for 25 years.

I do try to attend the foundation’s cocktail parties each year and I always pay my own way.

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Ginger

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