



TLR

Publisher: Richard Harley

Editor-In-Chief: Richard Harley

Managing Editor: Zahraa Hmood

Editor Emeritus: Kevin MacLean

Design & Layout: Richard Harley

Advertising: Megan Vanderlee,
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Contributors: Denise Ascenzo,
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**POSITIVE
POWER**

Contributed by Patty Garriock

“What we are today comes from our
thoughts of yesterday, and our present
thoughts build our life of tomorrow. Our life
is the creation of our mind.” - Buddha

HOW TO GET IN TOUCH

Email:

Letters: editor@niagaranow.com

Story Ideas: editor@niagaranow.com

Advertising: advertising@niagaranow.com

Phone

Newsroom: 905-359-2270

Advertising Department: 905-932-5646

Office Address

496 Mississauga St., NOTL, Ontario, Canada.

Mailing Address

PO Box 724, Niagara-on-the-Lake, L0S1J0

Have a lead on a story?

Call 905.359.2270 or send an email
to editor@niagaranow.com



Fall reds in bloom

Photographer Dave Van
de Laar captured this
image of the Niagara
River from Queenston.
The vibrant reds of fall
are in full swing this
week, so head out and
check out nature's art.

Editorial

Zalepa & Co. acted undemocratically

Richard Harley
Editor-in-Chief

They did nothing wrong
legally but got everything
wrong democratically.

Last week our town
council and mayor entered a
secret meeting, in a private
room away from the public
eye, to appoint someone
who didn't run in the last
election to fill a vacant seat
of council.

Yes, you read that cor-
rectly. Without public
consultation or a byelection,
our town council
decided to appoint Andrew
Niven, the current chair
of Tourism NOTL and the
Chamber of Commerce,
to council, rather than the
person who finished next
in the 2022 election.

The move ignored a
long-standing precedent
in our town to appoint the
next democratically chosen
runner-up.

Astonishingly — or may-
be not so much any more
— only two voices of reason
spoke against this decision:
Couns. Sandra O'Connor
and Gary Burroughs.

We want to emphasize
that none of this is Niven's
fault, and knowing Niven,
he will likely do a great
job at representing the
residents of NOTL.

But that is far from the
point.

The point is that our
council, or at least Zalepa
& Co., continues to act in
a way that spits in the face
of democracy and the resi-

dents of our town. And this
is just another example of
how five council members
continue to ignore the
people who voted them
into their positions.

While council was within
its rights to appoint some-
one to fill the seat per re-
quirements of the Municipal
Act — and while discussing
such matters in a closed-
session meeting seems to be
the norm across the board
in situations like this — the
move has rightfully angered
swaths of people in our
town, who are left wonder-
ing if their voices mean
anything any more.

And, really, are they
wrong to question that?
Based on the history of
this council, in just two
years, we would argue it's
become obvious the voices
of the people are secondary
to the enigmatic prefer-
ences of Zalepa & Co., who
vote together on just about
everything, as if the deci-
sions were cooked up in a
backroom cauldron of bad
ideas and egos.

Objectively, the clear and
obvious democratic choice,
next to holding an expensive
byelection, was to select the
next runner-up, Allan Bis-
back, to fill the vacant seat.

Bisback, who lost by
just 66 votes, has previous
council experience, was
interested in the posi-
tion, has no other jobs to
interfere with the time he
spends working for our
town (Niven has three
other jobs), and notably, is

the candidate the people
voted for — and who beat
Niven in the 2018 municip-
al election, by the way.

The appointment was an
insult to Bisback, his cam-
paign members and every
resident of Niagara-on-the-
Lake who cast a vote in the
last election.

Perhaps it's just a coinci-
dence Bisback has differ-
ing views than the current
gang of five who seem to
be running our council,
but it seems pretty obvious
why Zalepa's gang ignored
him. It appears to be noth-
ing more than sickening
cronyism and could be seen
as further evidence that
most of the members of this
council, especially Zalepa
and his deputy, Erwin
Wiens, think they know bet-
ter than everyone else.

It's part of a pattern of
certain council members
to ignore the voices of the
people of this town.

This egregious move
comes after several deci-
sions in which town coun-
cil has ignored the loud
cries of residents: With the
hotels at Parliament Oak
and on Queen Street, in
Glendale at White Oaks
and for the secondary plan.
The list goes on.

It also follows an Ontario
Land Tribunal decision in
favour of the town, which
showed Zalepa and Wiens
were wrong by proving de-
facto that not all legal chal-
lenges are losing battles at
the expense of the taxpayer.

Oops, we suppose that argu-

ment is out the window now.

It saddens us that we have
a majority of council that
seemingly doesn't care what
residents think and acts
collectively, often defending
their actions with poorly
justified excuses.

The only thing we can
say for Zalepa & Co. is that
at least they were demo-
cratically elected — even
if their platforms were 180
degrees from how they've
been voting. In many cases
they have not acted at all
how they told the electorate
they would, which in most
real-world circumstances is
simply called fraud.

But alas, this decision,
like some of the other
poor decisions this coun-
cil has made, is final and
can't be undone.

So with that, we must look
to the future.

We congratulate Niven
on his position and hope
his voice will be a refresh-
ing one and that he listens
to the people — even if
those people didn't put him
in his position.

And then we must look
to 2026, when voters can
decide if they want to
remove people from council
who seem to have forgot-
ten who put them in their
positions in the first place,
or who didn't live up to their
platforms and promises.

In the meantime, we can
celebrate that these deci-
sions are all on the record
for the public to see, share
and be loud about.

editor@niagaranow.com



Pauline Reimer Gibson
Audiologist

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