



Office of the Lord Mayor

Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

1593 Four Mile Creek Road, P.O. Box 100, Virgil, ON L0S 1T0

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Statement from Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa - Thank You Niagara-on-the-Lake

For Immediate Release

September 2, 2026

For the first time in many years, my name will not appear on a municipal or regional ballot. The nomination period for this year's municipal election is now closed. I have decided not to seek re-election as Lord Mayor.

It is a significant decision, but one I make with confidence in what comes next and a deep appreciation for what has come before. Niagara-on-the-Lake has never simply been the place I represent; it is home. My family and I have built our lives here, and long before I held elected office, I was part of this community through business, coaching, volunteering and local organizations. I first put my name on a ballot because I believed I could contribute to a place I cared deeply about, and that has remained my motivation throughout my time in public service.

I've had the privilege of representing Niagara-on-the-Lake as a Town Councillor, Regional Councillor and Lord Mayor. Those roles have given me a perspective on Niagara-on-the-Lake that not everyone gets to experience and have provided me with an even greater respect for the people who make it what it is.

Our residents are engaged; they pay attention, ask questions, challenge decisions, bring forward ideas, and expect their elected representatives to listen. I have always respected that. Whether you came to a meeting, wrote an email, picked up the phone, or stopped me somewhere in town for a conversation, thank you for being part of the process. I hope you continue to participate, ask questions, and share your ideas and concerns. Local government is better when the people it serves are part of the conversation.

Public service has also deepened my appreciation for the character of Niagara-on-the-Lake. We are one Town, but Old Town, Virgil, St. Davids, Queenston, Glendale and our rural areas each have their own identity, history and priorities. Representing the entire municipality teaches you that there is rarely one perspective and that finding the right balance matters.

I am proud of what we have accomplished together and of the many important issues we have moved forward during this term. There is far too much to capture in one statement, but I am particularly proud of the investments we have made in recreation, expanding programming, enhancing our parks and community facilities, and creating more opportunities for residents of all ages to be active and connected. We also adopted a new Official Plan that will guide Niagara-on-the-Lake for years to come, strengthened the protection of our heritage through the Old Town Heritage Conservation District, advanced the Glendale Secondary Plan and reopened our historic Court House to the public. Beyond



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these examples, we have addressed significant infrastructure needs and the pressures that come with growth while continuing to invest in the services our residents rely on every day.

Those accomplishments reflect something I believe strongly about Niagara-on-the-Lake: moving forward and protecting what makes this Town special are not mutually exclusive. We can plan responsibly for growth while protecting our agricultural lands, preserve our heritage while supporting a strong local economy, and prepare for the next generation without losing sight of what generations before us worked to build. I am proud of the progress we have made in finding that balance.

None of that work belongs to one person. I have had the opportunity to serve with many members of Council at both the Town and Niagara Region. We have accomplished a great deal together, found common ground through different perspectives, and made important decisions on behalf of the community we all care deeply about. That is part of the responsibility we accept when we put our names on a ballot. To my Council colleagues, past and present, thank you for your service and for the work we have done together.

I also want to thank the Staff at the Town and Niagara Region. Elected officials make decisions around the Council table, but turning those decisions into results requires the work of people throughout the organization. I have valued your expertise, your advice and your commitment to the residents we serve.

Some of the moments I will remember most didn't happen in Council Chambers; they happened at the arena, at community events, in local businesses, on the street and in countless conversations with residents. Those interactions have kept me connected to the people behind the decisions and reminded me why I chose public service in the first place.

Stepping away from elected office, however, does not mean stepping away from Niagara-on-the-Lake. I was involved in this community long before I was elected, and I will continue to be involved long after my term as Lord Mayor ends. Public office has been one way to contribute, but service to your community does not begin or end with a title. I look forward to remaining active in Niagara-on-the-Lake and contributing to its future in the years ahead.

To those who have put their names forward in this year's municipal election, I wish you the very best. Thank you for stepping forward and being willing to serve. Campaigns and public service both ask a great deal of you and of the people around you, and I wish each of you well in the months ahead and next term of Council.

My own work is not finished. There is still a term to complete, decisions to make and business before Council, and I remain fully committed to that work until my final day as Lord Mayor. When that day comes, I will look back on this chapter of my life with a tremendous sense of gratitude for the people I have met, the relationships I have built, the lessons I have learned and the opportunity to know this Town in a way I never could have otherwise.



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To my family, Tammy, Nathan and Benjamin, thank you. You have shared the elections, the late nights, the good days and the difficult ones. Your support allowed me to pursue something that mattered deeply to me, and I will always be grateful for that.

And to the residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake, thank you for your trust, for the conversations and challenges, for sharing your ideas, and for giving me the privilege of representing you. Years ago, I put my name forward because I believed that if you care about your community, you should be prepared to contribute to it. I still believe that today.

Serving Niagara-on-the-Lake has been one of my greatest honours. I am proud of what we have accomplished together, grateful for the opportunity to have played a part in it, and confident in the future of this Town. While my title may change, my commitment to this community will not. Niagara-on-the-Lake is home, and it always will be. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gary Zalepa
Lord Mayor