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Muddy mess closes tulip farm

Rain and traffic complaints force operation to shut down for a day



Tours of TASC tulip farm were rained out as visitors's vehicles got stuck in the mud and had to be pushed or dragged out. Heavy traffic was also a problem, sparking anger from residents who live nearby and apologies from the owners of the operation. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Andrew Hawlitzky | The Lake Report

April showers brought trouble to a Niagara-on-the-Lake tulip farm's May flowers, as their opening weekend devolved into a muddy, gridlocked headache for its staff and many, many visitors.

A five-hour traffic jam stretching 2.6 kilometres along Line 3 Road paralyzed access to the TASC Tulip Pick Farm on Saturday.

The traffic situation worsened after heavy rain flooded TASC's 20-acre grass parking lot, stranding over 50 vehicles in mud and forcing TASC to close the parking lot completely.

Cars sat bumper-to-bumper on May 3 from Concession 2 to Four Mile Creek Road after the farm closed its waterlogged lot at

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Strong mayor powers 'still a democratic process'

Julia Sacco
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The province's "strong mayor powers" have now come into effect for Niagara-on-the-Lake and its lord mayor, after councillors voted against rejecting them in a split vote last Tuesday night.

During the April 29 council meeting, councillors voted 5-4 against a motion brought forth by Coun. Sandra O'Connor, requesting that the province rescind the powers for NOTL.

Speaking on her motion, O'Connor quoted the mayor of Newmarket, John Taylor, who said the powers would show the province trusts the mayor's opinion more than that of other councillors in a municipality.

"This power is not needed to fulfil council's duty," she said.

NOTL would not be alone in rescinding the powers, O'Connor added.

"Nine other municipalities passed motions already,

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Hotel tax will fund $1.32 million reconstruction of Mississagua Street

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

For the next two years, NOTL residents can expect major upgrades to the roads and places tourists and locals use every day, including the $1.32 million reconstruction of one of Old Town's main roads, thanks to $1.71 million in funds from the town's hotel tax.

Over the past three years, tourists have brought more than $4.46 million into Niagara-on-the-Lake through its municipal accommodation tax, with half of it going to the municipality itself, after administration costs. Now, the town has decided how its share of that money will be spent.

The municipal accommodation tax, which started in 2022, adds a fee to hotels, motels, inns, resorts, cottages, villas, country inns and vacation rentals, currently at four per cent.

The town will use its funds to improve roads, sidewalks, travel direction signs, parks and public washrooms, said Kyle Freeborn, the town's treasurer, in an email to The Lake Report.

From now until 2027, all of the town's share will go toward repairing and upgrading spaces in areas that see heavy tourist traffic, including Mississagua

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Left: TASC staff help a tulip farm attendee to free his car from the mud as tire spins out. Right: Good Samaritan Evan Agnew-Stewart pulls a white Toyota out of the muddy parking lot as TASC staff help push. The rainy, muddy conditions caused the tulip farm to close early Sunday and invest in hay and mulch to stabilize the parking lot. ANDREW HAWLITZKY

Traffic turmoil tests tulip farm's blooming popularity

Continued from Front Page

2:30 p.m., despite forecasts predicting rain would stop by 11 a.m.

Staff barricaded entrances, shouting "We're closed!" to confused drivers, several of whom demanded refunds. Staff explained to drivers being turned away that their pre-purchased tickets would be valid until May 11 and refunds would be given.

TASC kept the event itself open until about 5:30 p.m. without access to the parking lot, leading people to illegally park on both sides of Line 3, congesting traffic even more as determined pedestrians walked along the road.

"We relied on a forecast that said rain would end at 11 a.m., but it never stopped," said Jill McCourt, wife of owner Frank Boendermaker. "We painstakingly tried to make this a great event for everybody, and unfortunately, the rain was something we couldn't control."

The misfortune escalated as parked vehicles spun tires in mud, some buried axle-deep.

Evan Agnew-Stewart, an attendee unaffiliated with TASC, used a personal truck to rescue cars.

"The only reason I came out here was to get my girlfriend, but why not help a couple people out, right?" Agnew-Stewart said.

Agnew-Stewart, whose girlfriend Jessica Lear worked parking duty, got down in the mud to attach his tow strap and got his own truck stuck a few times, to help a few grateful people — one of them thanked him with a tip.

TASC deployed their tractors to tow stranded cars so residents wouldn't have to rely on tow trucks.

"We don't want anyone to have to pay for a tow truck, so we're pulling out the tractors as fast as we can," said Lear.

Keegan Hill-Brown, who was exiting the event after TASC announced they were closing the parking lot at 2:30 p.m., wished TASC had made the call sooner.

"They could have announced it a bit earlier, just because a lot of friends are having a hard time getting out. Hopefully, we're not one of them," Hill-Brown said.

Despite frustrations, many attendees embraced the pandemonium. Local Josy D'Amico, who visited Friday, praised TASC's setup.

"They had umbrellas, boots, food — it was wonderful. People need to make the best of it and welcome this to the area," said D'Amico.

TASC closed Sunday to address the crisis, investing $30,000 in hay and mulch to stabilize the grass parking lot.

Owner Frank Boendermaker declined to comment on Saturday, but he met with Line 3 neighbours Monday, pledging improved drainage and traffic management.

Residents who attended the meeting say Boendermaker is committed to being a part of the community and listened to residents' suggestions about improving the traffic and parking to prevent similar situations from happening again.

One local farmer who attended the meeting acknowledged that the land the parking lot is situated on has about one foot of topsoil, then two layers of clay, making drainage difficult.

The farm reopened Monday with drier conditions.

McCourt emphasized tickets remain valid through May 11, with fall events planned for sunflowers and dahlias. For now, Niagara's tulip fever continues — rain or shine.

"Mother Nature brought the tulips, and Mother Nature brought the mess," said McCourt.

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Region restricts councillors from work-based U.S. travel

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

For the remainder of this year, Niagara Region councillors and staff are not allowed to attend the United States for conferences or trade shows on behalf of the region — whether attending as attendees, presenters or exhibitors.

The motion does not prohibit councillors' personal travel to the U.S.

The motion, brought forward by Lincoln regional Coun. Robert Foster, and passed Thursday night, will be implemented immediately.

"No discretionary trips for conferences or trade shows are to be made to the U.S. on behalf of the region, be it staff or council, for the remainder of 2025," said Foster at an April 24 regional council meeting.

Niagara-on-the-Lake Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa said that as a regional councillor, he would not advocate for this and as lord mayor, he would not implement anything like this.



Niagara Region councillors are restricted from U.S. travel for conferences and trade shows for the rest of 2025. Niagara-on-the-Lake Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa says he wouldn't have supported the restriction. FILE PHOTO

"I wouldn't have done that," said Zalepa. "I wouldn't advocate for that."

Advocacy efforts and government relations opportunities that are "required to advance Niagara in this economic turmoil" may be exempted from the prohibition, according to the motion.

Staff training or education critical to the future of the region, only available in the U.S., may also be exempted.

But all other staff development, training and education will now take place in Canada to save money and support Canadian schools and service providers.

Regional councillors will instead focus on Canadian partnerships that promote collaboration and knowledge-sharing, while any financial savings that come as a result of the motion will go into the region's reserves to support programs and services aimed at helping during these uncertain economic times.

U.S. President Donald Trump's threats to Canada's sovereignty and imposed tariffs were mentioned as one of the threats to Canada's economic stability at the meeting.

"All of us are hearing the concerns of our communities. Businesses, residents (and) support organizations have all been really clear," said Foster.

Niagara is especially vulnerable, with 72 per cent of goods produced in Niagara exported to the U.S. and 54 per cent of the region's input materials imported from the U.S., states the motion.

"We as councillors in the region need to acknowledge what I refer to as the economic tsunami coming at us," said Foster.

Zalepa decided not to attend the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative conference in the U.S. this year, but said it was based on the agenda and cost.

"It had nothing to do with, you know, about a 'right' — like the region has done. I just don't think that makes sense," he said.

Zalepa was a regional councillor from 2018 to 2022 and still is one, due to being lord mayor.

"I don't remember any time as a regional councillor having to go to a U.S. conference anyway," he said. "I don't see it as very consequential at all."

Zalepa argues that officials should, rather, weigh a trip's pros and cons and relevance to the municipality before deciding if it's worthwhile.

"It's really important for elected people today, right now, especially at this sensitive time, to really make sure that they evaluate the importance and the benefit of going," he said.

The goal should be to encourage American visitors to come to Canada, he said.

So he questions how consistent that goal is with restricting elected officials from travelling to the U.S. for business on behalf of the region.

The town's current policy for attending conferences requires participants to consider the conference's value to the town.

Zalepa said the policy hasn't changed in response to tariffs or U.S. threats, nor does he see a need to change it.

"The town's travel to the United States is pretty limited," he said.

The other regional councillor that represents NOTL, Andrea Kaiser, was not available for a comment by press time for her thoughts on this decision.

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