

SORE

Niagara on the Lake, www.sorenottl.ca
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Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

1593 Four Mile Creek Road
PO Box 100
Virgil, Ontario L0S 1T0

To: Lord Mayor Darte and Council

Cc: Holly Dowd, Craig Larmour, Raymond Tung

Re: Marotta Rand Proposal Livestream Meeting Report

You may be aware that representatives of SORE met with Mr. Marotta and his architect, Mr. MacKenzie, last Friday to discuss his hotel/conference facility proposal.

The meeting was both livestreamed and videotaped and is posted on the SORE [website-sorenottl.ca](http://www.sorenottl.ca). We encourage you to take the time to watch it.

The meeting was structured to discuss two matters:

1. why is Mr. Marotta not simply proceeding with the Romance Inn proposal, given that it was the result of a heavily negotiated compromise just six short years ago and was only narrowly approved by Council at the time by a one vote margin. As we put it to Mr. Marotta at the meeting, it was clear presumably to you when you bought the property that the Romance Inn proposal was right at the limit of what the Town was prepared to accept. Why would you think you had the license to throw that out the window and come back with an entirely different and much more intrusive and impactful proposal?
2. given the extensive negative feedback to the proposal to date from the Municipal Heritage Committee (who have final design approval on your proposal under the OPA for this site), from the Urban Design Committee and from the public, including SORE, what changes are you prepared to make to the proposal?

On item 1, Mr. Marotta's position is he needs more rooms than the Romance Inn provided for. We have asked for any studies or reports that support that assertion, recognizing that, at 145 rooms, Mr. Marotta's hotel would be the largest in Old Town. Further, we have concerns about the overall business model proposed by Mr. Marotta (i.e., 145 hotel rooms with 400+ parking spaces and 10,000 square feet of meeting/banquet space (he stated at our meeting that it is 5,000 not 10,000), suggesting far more intensive use of the site than merely hotel guests) and the implications on the adjacent residential neighborhood. To this end, we reminded Mr. Marotta that the economics of his hotel project, specifically the requirement of additional hotel rooms, are ultimately not our nor the Town's problem to solve.

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On item 2, Mr. Marotta and Mr. MacKenzie shared preliminary drawings for what appears to be a significantly revised proposal. They stated that it was still a work in progress and they were not yet ready to share it.

Both the MHC and UDC have made recommendations for a variety of peer reviews to be undertaken. Mr. Marotta reconfirmed at the meeting his support for those peer reviews and the other recommendations of these committees. Mr. Marotta also agreed at our meeting last Friday that the MHC should be intimately involved in the selection of the heritage impact peer review consultant and the development of the terms of reference for that peer review, given both the statutory role of the MHC and the final design approval authority vested in it by the Town's Official Plan opposite buildings on the Rand Estate. It is clear to us and presumably you that those peer reviews cannot commence until Mr. Marotta brings forward a revised proposal, including presumably revised heritage impact and other reports as appropriate to reflect the revised proposal. We are sure you agree that this matter is far too important for the locally and nationally significant Rand Estate, as well as Old Town NOTL and the adjacent National Historic Site, for it to be rushed by the proponent or staff/Council.

In this regard, we wish to register our concern that the Town be properly resourced to advise the MHC and Council with respect to the heritage impacts of any development on the Rand Estate. It is no understatement to say that this is among the most significant proposals ever to be made in NOTL in terms of its potential site-specific and broader heritage impacts. The Town lacks, to our knowledge, a qualified heritage planner at just the time when the need for such a resource has never been greater. We urge Council to ensure that such a resource is promptly procured on a contract or perhaps a permanent basis. Expert assistance will be required to successfully navigate the many heritage impact issues certain to arise with the Marotta proposals for the Rand Estate, and potentially in any appeal of a Council decision, where such a planner will need the necessary qualifications to be qualified to give evidence as an expert witness (as you will know from previous appearances at the OMB where Town staff were not qualified as experts).

We wish to also advise that our solicitors will be writing to the Town this week in relation to the completeness of the Marotta application as it currently sits.

Please let us know if you have any questions at this time.

Regards,

SORE Core Team

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