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SPECIAL REPORT:
PUT FORMER MAYOR MAL WOODHOUSE ON SPEED DIAL.

Thorold's independence needs a plan—and people who know how to deliver one.

Political opinion and commentary by Nicholas Bozza | November 10, 2026

A CHANGE OF PLAN—AND SOMETHING WORTH THE WAIT

My bonus article was scheduled for today, but former Thorold Mayor Mal Woodhouse's response deserves an article of its own. His account of Thorold's financial history—and its relevance to our city's future—takes the spotlight in today's special report.

On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, I'll bring you an illustrated satire, each no longer than one page. A little laughter, without homework.

The bonus article will follow by Saturday at the latest, possibly sooner. In my admittedly biased opinion, it's something special, and I want to give it the care it deserves. Thank you for following along. The bonus is coming—I'm just making sure it earns the name.

Article copy: 1,419 words | Estimated reading time: 3.5 minutes
At approximately 300 words per minute, a high-school-level reading pace. Excludes titles, headings, publication update, cartoons, disclaimers, source notes and recurring headers and footers.

POLITICAL OPINION AND SATIRE. This report combines the author's opinions, rhetorical questions and humour with Malcolm Woodhouse's attributed recollections.

MAL WOODHOUSE'S ACCOUNT OF HIS YEARS IN THOROLD POLITICS, including his term as mayor, offers a lesson for anyone concerned about the city's independence. He recalls responding to provincial funding cuts with operational restructuring and a ten-year strategic plan, while achieving three successive annual tax reductions. His example suggests that defending a municipality begins with demonstrating that it can manage its own affairs effectively.

[In Mal's words: "I restructured the entire city operations and completed Thorold's first long term 10 year strategic plan. This resulted in a tax reduction for each of the next three years, inspite of the fact that Premier Harris cut our transfer grants in an effort to force us the amalgamate."]

That is why professional experience matters. Managing budgets, overseeing complex projects and planning beyond the next election are practical skills with consequences for taxpayers. Mal can explain the decisions he made, the purpose behind them and the results he says followed.

The UN-FAB FOUR should be expected to provide the same clear accounting of their contributions—and their goals for the coming term. **I am still waiting for answers about the last term and a plan for this term that meet that standard. So far, the crickets seem better prepared for the interview.**

Experience worth calling upon

Mal's experience spans City Hall, Niagara College and the Niagara Regional Police Board. Here's how he describes his work at the college and the board:

"At Niagara College I was promoted from Health and Safety manager to Director of Facilities Management. I managed all College facilities including building new buildings, land purchased and sold. In my last year I managed the largest reconstruction in the College history which included new buildings on both campus. That capital budget exceeded $91,000,000 and all projects were delivered on time and UNDER budget. My annual

operating budget was around 6-7 million. I did this at the same time as chairing the Niagara Regional Police board and their budget and restructuring."

Three for three. Mal says Thorold's taxes went down in each of his three years as mayor. Add that to the college and police board work he describes, and that's a lot of rabbits for one hat.

With Thorold in a vice and the province's hand on the handle, why haven't we put Mal Woodhouse on retainer yet?

The last time I saw Mal, I told him he looked like five million dollars. He looked confused. "I would have said a million bucks," I explained, "but a million just doesn't buy what it used to." We had a chuckle. His reported budget responsibilities, however, were serious numbers—and the reported results matter even more.

Those figures describe the career achievements supported by substantial experience in managing money, projects and competing demands.

For taxpayers, the relevance is straightforward: **experience becomes valuable when someone can explain how it produced results.**

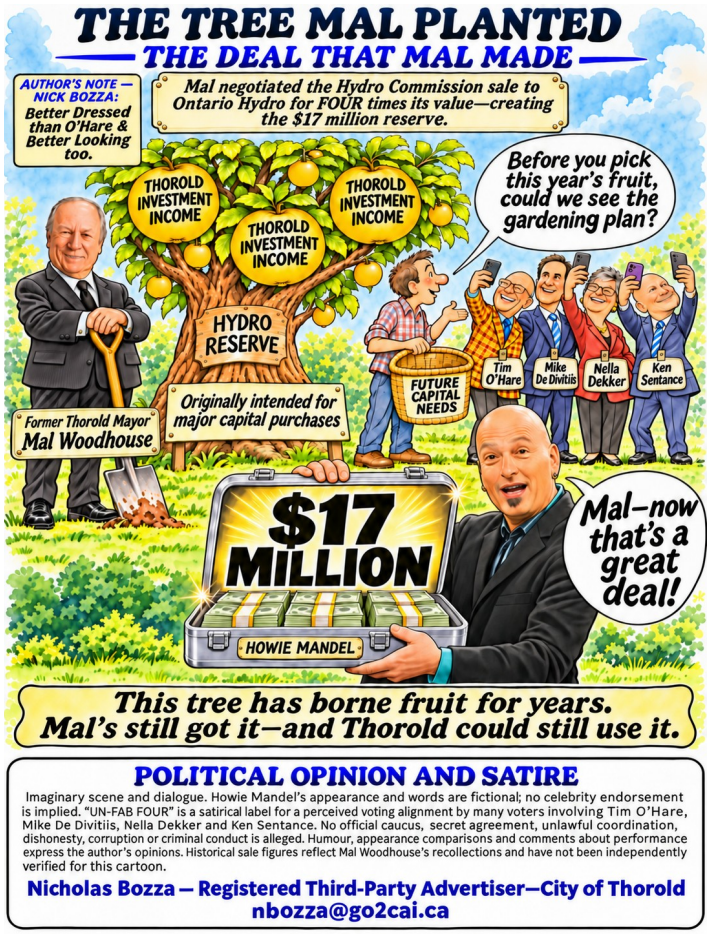
A legacy that kept working

Mal also describes helping create a lasting source of investment income through the hydro sale and the reserve established from its proceeds. The sale was a one-time transaction; investing the proceeds created the ongoing revenue opportunity.

According to his account, the resulting $17 million reserve was intended to generate earnings for major capital purchases, helping keep those purchases from becoming additional pressures on annual property taxes.

[In Mal's words: "After not running for reelection I wanted to ensure the sale was completed so I ran for a position on the Thorold Hydro Board and alone with Henry (meaning D'Angela) we completed the deal and Thorold Council agreed to setting up the $17,000,000 reserves. The reserve revenues that were generated were only to be used for major capital purchases eg fire trucks etc so they wouldn't affect the annual tax bill."] What stands out is that Mal chose to forgo a second run for mayor and sought a seat on the Thorold Hydro Board to help see the $17 million deal through.

That is the kind of legacy worth examining: a decision designed to benefit residents long after the people who made it had left office.



What comparable opportunities will this council investigate?

New revenue requires research, realistic financial projections and an assessment of costs and risks. What opportunities will councillors examine? When will residents hear the findings? How will success be measured?

Taxpayers deserve to see that work take shape in a public plan.

They wanted the power. Where is the plan?

The UN-FAB FOUR now hold four of the six councillor seats. With that voting strength comes an obligation to explain what they intend to accomplish.

Residents should not have to spend four years guessing at the destination while paying for the journey.

I cannot tell readers what privately motivates these councillors. I can ask whether their public agenda demonstrates the ambition and preparation Thorold needs. If they share particular goals, explain them. If they have different priorities, explain those individually.

Either way, give taxpayers something more useful than another campaign slogan.

What is the reserve doing for tomorrow?

Mal's explanation of the hydro reserve raises another question: are we using yesterday's achievement to build tomorrow's city, or to make this year's budget easier to present? **Or to save Thorold from amalgamation?**

According to Mal, the deals author, the reserve's earnings were intended to fund major capital purchases. If their purpose has shifted toward supporting annual operations, residents deserve an explanation of that choice, its benefits and its long-term consequences.

Using investment earnings for operations may provide **a mirage of an immediate tax relief.** The question is what happens to the capital needs those earnings were originally intended to address. **Council should explain the trade-off clearly.**



Independence needs evidence

A credible case for Thorold's independence needs clear goals and measurable progress: sound finances, reliable services, disciplined project management and a practical plan for future capital needs.

Those results would strengthen the argument for local autonomy, even though they cannot guarantee what the province might decide.

Nor should we assume that generating additional revenue would 'automatically' bring additional provincial assistance. Council should investigate how any proposal would interact with funding programs and demonstrate the net benefit to Thorold taxpayers.

Hope is welcome. A financial plan needs arithmetic, practical experience and someone who can turn an idea into a result—and explain that result convincingly.

Without goals, how do residents judge progress? Without evidence of progress, what case are we preparing to make for Thorold's future?

Ask someone who helped build it

If I wanted to understand a complicated book and had the chance to ask its authors about it, I'd start there. The same goes for Thorold. If I wanted to understand the thinking behind the hydro reserve, the restructuring Mal Woodhouse describes for Thorold, Niagara College, the Police Board as Chair, and how he kept amalgamation off the table during his time as mayor, I'd start by asking someone who was directly involved. I'd ask Mal.

Why reconstruct the reasoning from a distance when we can still call him?

In my view, council should promptly explore whether Mal would be willing to serve as an adviser. His knowledge of Thorold's financial history and his broader management experience warrant that conversation.

If a paid consulting role makes sense, which I believe it does then: define the assignment, disclose the cost and specify the expected results. Give him a concrete problem to examine and taxpayers a clear way to judge the value of his advice. Or use him as a sound board to review alternatives before Thorold acts.

The first assignment practically writes itself: what should Thorold do now to strengthen its finances and its case for continued independence?

A standard taxpayers can use

Mal says he entered office with a mandate and left after achieving it. His account provides a useful standard: identify the job, explain the actions and show the results.

That is the standard I want applied to this council.

Winning another election gives councillors another term. It does not relieve them of the obligation to explain what they accomplished in the last one—or to set measurable goals by which taxpayers can grade the next.

Thorold should be preparing its strongest case for its future now. In my view, Mal's experience deserves a place in that preparation.

I'm not much of a betting man at all, but I'd put Mal on speed dial—and the UN-FAB FOUR should make the call before Thorold needs directions to its new City Hall. I make plenty of jokes. This recommendation isn't one of them.

This is about protecting Thorold's future. If council makes that call and an advisory role produces meaningful results, councillors would deserve credit for recognizing useful experience and putting it to work. No adviser can promise to prevent amalgamation, but council can act now to strengthen Thorold's position. That's unarguable.

Source and editorial notes

Former Thorold Mayor Malcolm Woodhouse's account was provided in a personal email to the author dated November 10, 2026. His descriptions of historical decisions, financial figures, intended reserve uses and project outcomes are his recollections and have not been independently verified for this report. Statements about the reserve's original purpose do not establish its current legal restrictions or current accounting treatment. The discussion of subsequent uses is conditional and is not a finding of financial impropriety.

"UN-FAB FOUR" is a satirical label used here for a perceived voting alignment involving Tim O'Hare, Mike De Divitiis, Nella Dekker and Ken Sentance. It does not allege an official caucus, secret agreement, unlawful coordination or criminal conduct. References to voting strength do not establish that these councillors always vote together. Humour and rhetorical questions express the author's views and do not establish undisclosed motives or facts.

Recommendations about advisory work and municipal independence are the author's opinions. This report does not claim that any individual, financial strategy or council can guarantee protection from amalgamation. Readers should assess the commentary alongside council records, financial statements and the councillors' own explanations.

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