



# Township of Muskoka Lakes

## Mayor's Message

June 2019

### Greetings

As we enter the summer and I look back over the past six months since your new council has taken office, to say I am proud of council, staff and our residents would be an understatement. Floods, new council structure, new CAO, new Fire Chief, webcasting are just a few of the many highlights marking a very, very busy winter/spring.

### Webcasting

Since December, when our new council was sworn in, it is already evident that you have elected an engaged, energetic and respectful council. Working collaboratively with councillors and with staff, council has demonstrated an openness to new and different ideas and not just accepting the status quo.

Realizing that not everyone is able to attend our meetings, one of our campaign promises was that of webcasting and I am happy to say that by the time you are reading this, you will be able to stream video our webcasts. Visit the township website at [muskokalakes.ca](http://muskokalakes.ca) for links to either live broadcasts of our meetings, or archived meetings starting June 2019.

### Improved Access to Governance

With an increased commitment to community engagement, we have also updated our procedural by-laws and effective July 2019; we are adopting a new committee structure with Council to better deal with the issues affecting Muskoka Lakes.

Our first "General/Finance Committee" will meet on July 11<sup>th</sup>, with our first "Planning Committee" meeting taking place on July 12<sup>th</sup>. These two new "standing committees" of council are designed to engage more with the public and allow specific councillors to become experts in their respective fields. Recommendations from these two standing committees will be ratified the following month (August) by all of Council, giving the public a full 30 days to comment on any recommendations before Council approves them.

Three other citizen (and councillor) based advisory committees have been formed (that will report to the standing committees). These include Economic Development & Grants, Heritage & Attainable Housing, as well as Parks & Trails. These committees will meet on an as required schedule with meetings called by the respective committee chairs.

### Spring Flood

Flood, flood, flood – everywhere a flood. Yes, clearly that was the topic of conversation this spring and I assume will be the same for the coming months. Never in the history of Muskoka Lakes have we ever had to declare a state of emergency and it was something I didn't take lightly. However, when people's lives and access to their homes were threatened, we needed the help of the Province and on April 28<sup>th</sup>, we declared a State of Emergency. As the waters continued to rise, staff and Volunteer Firefighters at Muskoka Lakes, individual council members, as well as neighbours, friends and family all came together to help and support with sandbags, food, shelter and emotional support during this historic time. On May 15<sup>th</sup>, with water levels receding and all roads re-opened, we were able to lift the State of Emergency, signalling "open for business" on the Victoria Day holiday weekend.

I personally want to thank our Senior Staff who worked tirelessly through this disaster to protect our residents, and equally important all staff and volunteers who came to the table to help in so many ways. I am proud to work with these people and all residents. Whether a permanent resident or seasonal resident, we can be thankful we have the staff we do who went above and beyond to help and support – thank you.

There is lots of background and history as to why we flooded this year and we can also point to some specific information including an almost double snowpack across our watershed. Without dwelling on mistakes or what happened this year, the good news is that in early May, I had an opportunity to sit one-on-one with Premier Ford for almost 45 minutes to discuss all things flood and all things Muskoka Lakes.

After that meeting, during a press conference, Premier Ford stated that "the Province can do a better job of water management" and that he would strike a task force to examine the problem and provide recommendations going forward. The Premier was a man of his word and within 10 days thereafter, myself, along with the Mayor's of Bracebridge, Huntsville and two other flood effected Municipalities further north, met with Finance Minister Vic Fedeli, MPP Jim McDonnell and MPP Toby Barrett, Parliamentary assistants for the Ministry of Municipal Housing and Affairs as well as the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. Also in attendance was MPP Norm Millar, MP Tony Clement, District Chair John Klink, and the Muskoka Watershed Council members. Based on the feedback of those invited guests around the table, it appears the Province understands the magnitude of the issues. In the meeting we talked all things flood, issues, recovery and very high level going forward ideas. In my opinion, the Province is committed to solving this problem and we look forward to additional engagement and next steps early to mid June.

**New Staff**

In January, our former CAO (Chief Administrative Officer) announced his retirement and our Fire Chief advised that he would be leaving for another opportunity. Despite the changes in Senior Management, we have taken this as an opportunity to engage new skills in our leadership at the township and as of June 3<sup>rd</sup>, two new senior staff have started.

Firstly, I am pleased to welcome Ryan Murrell to the position of Fire Chief. Ryan comes to us from Dryden, Ontario and brings not only a wealth of knowledge and insight into fire protection, he also has demonstrated out of the box thinking in the past to help deliver increased service without having to increase the cost of fire service.

Derrick Hammond now fills the top job at the township (CAO). Derrick has spent his career in Muskoka, working with Lake of Bays, the District of Muskoka and Town of Huntsville. I personally met Derrick almost 9 years ago when he was at the District of Muskoka and started the Continuous Improvement Unit. With a planning background, Derrick brings a history in Muskoka, long standing relationships with other Municipalities across the District as well as an approach to refinement and enhancement that mirrors our council's attitude. Personally, I could not have asked for better resumes or experience from both Ryan and Derrick – our Township and Staff are in GREAT hands.

**Summer Activities**

As we head into the summer season, I hope people can put this spring flood behind them and enjoy all that Muskoka has to offer you, with your friends and family. In that light, in the past, the Mayor has always hosted a golf tournament to support a local charity and as noted in my last update, I too had anticipated doing the same. However, with the flood devastation this year, I have decided to modify these plans to allow all of Muskoka to participate, not in a golf tournament, but in a Canada Day, Family Water Sports Day. Visit the township website for complete details but plan to bring your family and friends to Clevelands House on the afternoon of Monday, July 1<sup>st</sup> (Canada day) for various water sports, food, entertainment and activities for all ages. Proceeds from this fundraising event will be directed to two worthy causes including Andy's House Hospice Muskoka in Port Carling, and Flood Victims in Muskoka Lakes.

I am looking forward to a great summer and hope to see you on July 1<sup>st</sup> as we raise money for Muskoka Flood Victims and Andy's House.

**Code of Conduct**

Over the past couple of years, we have heard concerns with short-term cottage rentals in the area. The previous Council appointed a citizen Steering Committee to review the matter. Rather than impose a licensing system which could have potential significant administrative and financial burden to the Township, the Steering Committee recommended the development of a Code of Conduct or educational approach, with potentially increased enforcement of new and updated By-laws to address the root cause of concerns.

This Code of Conduct is available on the Township website under the Community Menu Tab. The Code of Conduct highlights habits for residents to consider for being a courteous neighbour. Recommendations in regards to noise, parking, lighting, garbage, environment, boating, fire safety, wildlife, and children and pets can be found in the two-page document.

**Tax Bill Information**

Property taxes are due twice per year. The first bill, the interim bill, is due in March and represents 50% of the previous years' levied taxes. The final tax bill is due in August each year. Your tax bill is your official receipt for income tax purposes.

The Township of Muskoka Lakes is offering a new service called Property Tax On-Line where you can access your property tax account information on-line 24/7 and pay your property taxes by Visa/Mastercard credit card, or Visa/Mastercard debit card. Please visit the Township website to access the portal.

If you have not received a bill or would like additional information please contact the Property Tax Department at 705-765-3156 or by email at [propertytax@tomls.ca](mailto:propertytax@tomls.ca).

**Council Contact Information**

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