



Township of Muskoka Lakes

Mayor's Message

June 2020

Dear Residents:

It is always a privilege to provide greetings on behalf of the Township of Muskoka Lakes. My message last year was about an unprecedented event, which involved the Township's first ever declared State of Emergency related to the 2019 Spring Flooding. Who knew we would be under a Provincial State of Emergency this year related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Let's all hope for a more normal 2021 – Please and Thank you.

2020 Property Tax Bill

Property taxes are due twice per year. The interim bill is due in March and represents 50% of the previous years' levied taxes. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, Council adopted a motion to extend the waiving of penalties that would otherwise be charged for the non-payment of 2020 interim taxes that were due on March 27, 2020. Council's decision removes any penalties charged on non-payment of 2020 interim taxes until July 31, 2020.

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 cards. Tax bills are not currently located within the tax portal. All bills will continue to be mailed via Canada Post. Your tax bill is your official receipt for income tax purposes. Re-print requests are subject to a \$20.00 charge. 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.

Covid-19

Covid-19, social distance, wear a mask, wash your hands, quarantine, new normal, virus, flatten the curve, lock down, stay home, stay apart, stage 1, stage 2 and most of all – global pandemic. We've all heard it, read it, and likely have fatigue because of it. Despite as much as I (and everyone I come in contact with) want to move on from Covid-19, we can't. If we don't respect this virus and adopt a new normal for this coming summer and fall, and even winter – we risk experiencing a second wave bigger than the first. So in response, let's all work together and most important respect one another while in public.

I know each and every one of you will likely agree that Covid-19 has been one of the biggest polarizing issues or topic that we will see in our lifetime. While well intended, the directives or suggestions from the Province resulted in confusion, frustration, anger, outrage, fear and disappointment in communities across Ontario.

This resulted in lines having been drawn, with some community members pointing fingers at others expecting everyone to act in a certain fashion. I can tell

you that no matter what I or any member of Council said or did, someone was not happy. So if you were offended in any way, please accept my humble apologies. However, please understand that our marching orders were for the most part repeated direction from the Province (who changed their messages frequently) leaving Muskoka Lakes with sometimes less than clear messaging.

So, where are we now and what does Stage 2 of the Provincial plan to reopen the economy mean for Muskoka Lakes? I am sure each of you are slowly getting back or adjusting to a new normal of smaller groups, wearing a mask in public, waiting in lines to enter stores and with overnight camps being closed this summer, you're probably finding it hard to find things to occupy your kids.

Township operations continue as business as "unusual", which means public buildings still remain closed to the public. However, key functions and work related to finance, planning matters, building permits, etc., continue. This includes of course, our roads crews and parks maintenance staff, who are out keeping our Muskoka beautiful. While our parks and beaches remain open, regrettably, out of an abundance of caution to keep everyone safe, we had to cancel our swim program for this summer. Many people ask why can't you re-open the Township office? Good question and we will in time, but currently, to ensure the safety of staff, we are observing social distancing at the workplace. This means that some of our staff are working from the office and some from home while providing programs and services electronically.

In addition, we are holding full Council and Committee meetings, and asking for public comments to be either emailed in prior to the meetings or in some cases allowing the public to join in and delegate via Zoom. We will begin holding Planning meetings and even Committee of Adjustment meetings in July. It is all different, it is all new and I would like to thank staff and each and every Councillor for adapting to a new way of doing business with new protocols and limitations as we work through this unprecedented time.

My final comment on Covid-19 and the new normal would be to request your patience with your Council as we adapt to Zoom meetings. Also, please be patient with staff as they may take longer to get back with answers, and please be respectful of people you encounter when in public.

Muskoka Lakes Public Library

As per other Township buildings, the Muskoka Lakes Public Library remains closed to the public. However, the library is offering contactless, outside pick up, of pre-ordered items and, of course, the online databases are available 24/7 with your membership.



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Did you know that the library has thousands of the latest movies, primetime TV series, bestseller books for all ages, magazines, and many online databases, and that as a taxpayer or resident in Muskoka Lakes, you are able to use it all for free? If you aren't a member yet, you can apply for a membership through the library's website.

How else can the library serve the people of the Township of Muskoka Lakes? Staff and the Library Board are working hard through these unprecedented times to serve our Muskoka Lakes community. I encourage everyone, library user or not, to take a short survey found on the library website, www.muskokalakes.ca/library. You can help shape the future of library services in our community by having your voice heard.

Residents Against Muskoka Poverty

Some additional good news is that of a new initiative to help reduce poverty by a group called RAMP (Residents Against Muskoka Poverty). I know people think of Muskoka as extremely affluent but the fact is 13% of residents are living in poverty. RAMP is a great new initiative and one that I am proud to be associated with. For more information visit rampupmuskoka.ca

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. 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.

Support Local Businesses

As the economy continues to open up again under Provincial guidelines, more businesses are looking to resume operations. Local consumers are encouraged to renew their relationships with their favorite local service providers in a safe manner.

Local businesses are the heartbeat of our community. Now more than ever they need our support. Here are ten ways you could consider to support a local business during these unprecedented times.

1. Shop local
2. Write a positive online review
3. Show gratitude
4. Order local
5. Purchase a gift card for later
6. Participate in a virtual class
7. Create a local bucket list
8. Share a post of your favourite local business
9. Get your holiday shopping done (extra) early
10. Add photos to a Google business listing

Final Thoughts

Despite the Covid-19 slowdown, work continues on Council with our Strategic Plan. This strategy will bridge this term of Council with the new Council set to take office in 2022. Our new Official Plan continues to make headway with planned public consultation later this summer and our Minett Official Plan Amendment should be public in early August.

Thank you all and please enjoy summer 2020 while remembering social distancing protocols.



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