



Township of Muskoka Lakes

Mayor's Message

February 2020

Dear Residents:

On behalf of Council and staff, I would like to wish you a happy and prosperous New Year.

Respectful, engaged, focused and optimistic would be the words I use to describe this past year. As we look towards 2020 (with vision, hindsight and foresight), residents, Council and staff should anticipate more of the same.

2020 Property Tax Bill

Included in this envelope (if you are not on a monthly pre-authorized payment plan) is your 2020 interim tax bill. As per the Municipal Act, the amount calculated for this installment is 50% of your 2019 tax levy. In June, we will be sending out the final tax bills that will include any taxation adjustments required for 2020.

For more information on alternatives for paying your taxes, including pre-authorized monthly payments and credit card options, please contact the Tax Department at 705-765-3156. For mailing address changes, you can either call or email propertytax@tomls.ca.

Flooding Update

Not to repeat my words from last summer, but the devastation caused by the spring floods of 2019 certainly left an everlasting impact in the lives of our property owners. At every possible opportunity, staff and Council continue to engage with the Provincial Government for help and support related to flooding, as well as advocate for measures that would eliminate, or at a minimum, reduce future flooding.

There is not a week that goes by that a staff member, Councillor, or I are not having a discussion with respect to the Muskoka River Water Management Plan (MRWMP). Although to date, I personally have not seen the short-term amendments required to the plan to rectify its issues, staff and Council at the Township and for that matter, across the District, all have a common goal – Stop the Flooding.

There have been a number of concerted efforts initiated by the Provincial Government in understanding our watershed and the floods, including appointing a Provincial Flood Advisor, as well as a Muskoka Watershed Advisory Group (chaired by a Lake Joseph resident). Additionally, we have been assured that the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF), who is responsible for administering the MRWMP (lake levels), is on "high alert" to ensure our water levels are appropriate to manage snow pack and the spring melt.

As I am reminded that 90% of Muskoka snowmobile trails are currently closed (due to lack of snow), this unusually light winter and snowpack across the entire province (and in particular our watershed) should provide added piece of mind. At this time, I wish I could give each of you plans that are more concrete; however I can promise you this remains a top priority for Council and myself.

Official Plan Review

As we look forward to the coming year, each of you should take note of a few things. Firstly, we are updating the Township Official Plan. This is the overarching planning document that helps set the structure and tone for the long-term development of Muskoka Lakes. To date, we have held two public input sessions and this coming year we will be engaging with the public on proposed new and existing policies. Please continue to monitor the Township's website for updates and to register for email notifications on upcoming meetings.

Strategic Plan Development

Having sat on Council since 2010, and now in my third term, it became evident to me that depending on the number of newly elected members on Council each term, a new Strategic Plan for the Township was initiated almost immediately after every election. In my opinion, this allows the Township to be "directed" by the "Council of the day" and may have significant swings Council term by Council term.

A year ago, we made a conscious effort to respect the last term of Council knowing that their Strategic Plan for the Township had a few things left to be completed. To that end, we delayed the development of a new Strategic Plan for a year and as I type, we are currently in development of this new guiding document. The Strategic Plan offers goals, programs, ideas and direction for staff of the Township to follow as determined by Council with significant public input.

The idea for our new 4 year Strategic Plan is to be a bridge between this term of Council and the next, as it will expire in 2024 or 2 years after the next election. The hope and plan is that this will offer greater stability with more focused direction and ultimately provide long-term thinking across the Township. Again, check the Township website for more information and public input over the coming months regarding our new Strategic Plan.

Minett

There continues to be a lot of interest in Minett and the current Interim Control By-law that will expire this May. About a year and a half ago, a Steering Committee was established to evaluate and make recommendations to update or modify Official Plan policies for Minett. As this process was happening, an individual who did not agree with the vision of the previous proposal stepped up and purchased the largest property in Minett (Clevelands House, etc.) to ensure any future development is responsible.



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In January 2020, the Steering Committee released their recommendations so that Council, in consultation with key stakeholders and property owners in Minett, can draft an amendment to the Official Plan that will be contemplated in late spring or early summer. This is a major win for Muskoka and the Minett area. I would like to thank the Steering Committee for all their hard work over the past year in coming up with these invaluable recommendations.

District of Muskoka | Waste Collection

On the District of Muskoka front, as your Mayor and Chair of the District's Engineering and Public Works Committee – one of the most significant issues facing Muskoka Lakes (and the entire District for that matter) over the next few years is that of waste collection (garbage), in particular bin sites typically serving island properties. This past summer, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) mandated the complete closure of all unlicensed, unsupervised bin sites across the province by 2022, with the immediate (summer 2020) closure of almost 30 bin sites across Muskoka. To highlight the problem, there are currently 88 bin sites across all of Muskoka, with 21 in Muskoka Lakes. These bin sites have propagated abuse, illegal dumping, and pose a pollution risk to Muskoka's waterbodies, as many are located along shorelines. Garbage limits are not enforceable and commercial businesses are using these sites for free disposal. The bins have become problematic, unsafe and most importantly, as noted, they do not align with the vision for responsible waste management as mandated by the MECP.

This past fall we pushed back on the MECP and suggested their plan was too aggressive, stating we could not meet their timelines. They did listen, modified their plans, and worked with our District staff to find an alternative solution. In short, they (and our staff) visited every one of the 88 bin sites, did an extensive evaluation of each site, noting the environmental issues and other potential risks, and worked on mitigation measures where possible. The results of those collaborative efforts is a significant reduction in the number of proposed closed sites for 2020, with only 2 in Muskoka Lakes that may have to be closed this coming summer. At this point, the District and MECP are working on a variety of alternative waste collection solutions and my best advice if you currently utilize bin sites in Muskoka (not to alarm anyone when they arrive back to their cottage in May) is to visit www.EngageMuskoka.ca to register for updates. This is a fast moving and ever changing issue with solutions and alternatives being evaluated daily. Please view the District of Muskoka insert for more information.

Bubblers

My final point for discussion is that of bubblers. I am concerned bubblers (and in particular over bubbling) are affecting our lake health. Ice (or open water) in front of one property is regularly joining their neighbouring properties open water. The result of this is that access to either the land or ice is cut off and

has significant change to deer wintering patterns, other wildlife and the general public or property owners that fish or snowmobile during the winter. Please, if you utilize a bubbler, put it on a timer. During the coldest days of winter, your bubbler probably only needs to operate 10 to 12 hours a day. In the middle of February or March, you may be able to reduce that time to 6 or 8 hours a day.

As a final point, the use of red bubbler lights to warn people of open water can be problematic. The issue facing those that travel the lakes at night is red lights look like tail lights on snowmobiles and as such, it is very easy to "follow" someone into a bubbler – this would be counter productive as to why you have a light. Amber lights, though slightly different from red tail lights can also be confusing in that a cottage light inside shining out can appear amber, not to mention amber lights do not penetrate fog or snow very well.

Based on this, I encourage the use of blue bubbler lights. Blue not only is the most penetrating colour in the dark (notice runway lights at an airport), but it is also a colour used for snowplows and emergency vehicles to warn people of danger and caution. Please, if you can, change your light this season or at the very least, ensure that next season you utilize a blue bubbler light so that those who travel the waterways during the winter months (on the ice) are alerted to any and all open water near your property.

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