



COMMUNITY VISION SUMMARY

Township of Muskoka Lakes Official Plan Review

Prepared by LURA Consulting
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Introduction

Muskoka Lakes is at an exciting time as it matures and continues to change. The Township is working on a review of its Official Plan to enhance the quality of life for permanent and seasonal residents of Muskoka Lakes; and to establish/maintain a desirable community where permanent and seasonal residents can live, work and play.

The goals of the Official Plan Review are:

- Confirm the community’s vision for the future of Muskoka Lakes;
- Re-enforce key policies in the current Official Plan, which have supported desirable development in the right places and preserved other key areas;
- Incorporate new policies that reflect the community's desire to encourage a sustainable and healthy community; and,
- Incorporate new policies that put the environment first in order to ensure a high quality of life for current and future generations.

This report provides a brief summary of what we heard during the Community Visioning phase of the engagement process, which occurred between July 19, 2019 – August 16, 2019.

Engagement Approach

The goals of the Community Visioning phase of engagement were to raise awareness about the Official Plan Review project, collect public and stakeholder feedback to contribute to the vision of Muskoka Lakes, and to assist in the development of a stakeholder and interested party contact list.

Community members had both in-person and online opportunities to engage in the process and to contribute to the community vision. The following engagement tactics were used during this phase:

- **Community Vision Session** – an in-person, three-hour session where participants were presented the project background, had the opportunity to identify key vision ingredients, and asked the following questions:
 - What are the key issues facing the Township currently?
 - How can we encourage economic growth in the Township while ensuring our natural environment and unique character of Muskoka are maintained and enhanced?
 - What could the updated Official Plan do better than it does now?
 - Does the current vision statement resonate with you? Why or why not?
- **Online Survey** – an online survey, hosted on SurveyMonkey, provided community members with an opportunity to provide their feedback on the questions from the in-person session at their own leisure.

The engagement opportunities above were promoted to the community through a public notice of project commencement, and the Township’s social media channels (Facebook and Twitter).

Over 850 people participated in the Community Visioning engagement activities. The results of community engagement efforts are summarized in the table below.

Engagement Tactic	Date	Number of Participants
Community Vision Session	July 19, 2019	45
Online Survey	July 22 – August 9, 2019	808

What We Heard

The following provides highlights of the key themes that emerged through participant feedback. Detailed participant responses from engagement activities can be found in the Appendix.

Visioning

The current vision statement for the Township of Muskoka Lakes is:

The Township of Muskoka Lakes will continue to grow and continue to change. The Official Plan recognizes and supports the Township of Muskoka Lakes as a vibrant, prosperous community. Its lakes and rivers are preeminent resources that define the municipality and are vital to the Township's character and economy.

Participants of the community visioning session and online survey were both asked whether or not the current vision statement resonates with them. As seen in Figure 2 (below), most survey participants indicated that the current vision statement resonated with them (55.3%). Key reasons participants shared for supporting the current vision included: the fact that change and growth is inevitable; the lakes and water are preeminent resources; and, the vision is true and broad enough to last a long time. Additional key themes included: considering adding other natural features (i.e. forests, wetlands, rock, etc.) as key resources; taking the current statement a step further to specify that there needs to be *sustainable* growth; and, it should be balanced with environmental protection and preservation.

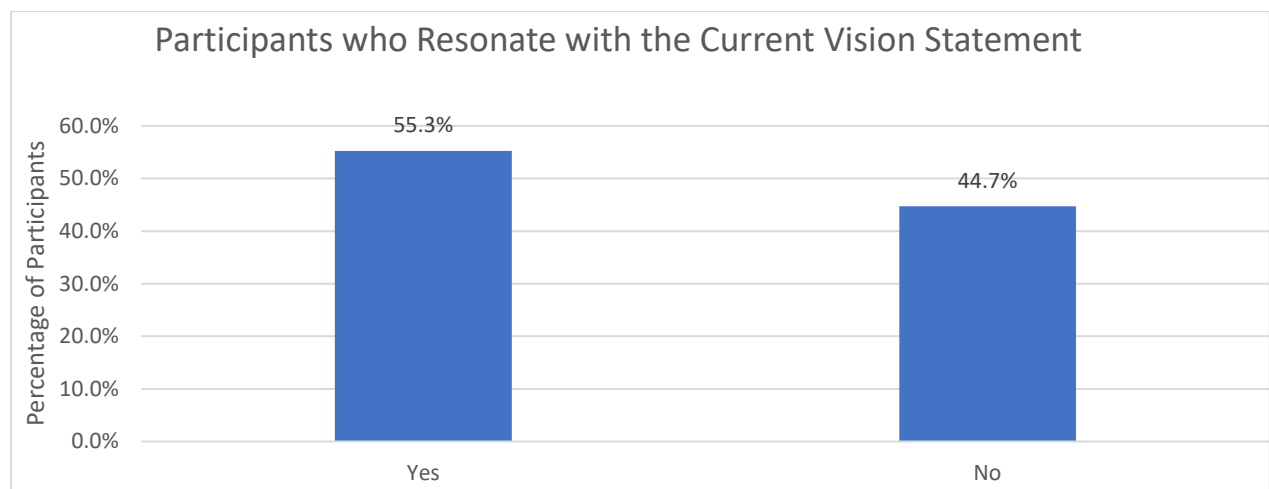


Figure 1: Percentage of survey participants indicating whether or not the current vision resonates with them. n=796

At the community visioning session, the consensus in the room indicated that majority of participants did not resonate with the current vision statement (detailed numbers can be found in the Appendix), in addition to 44.7% of survey participants. Participants felt that the current vision is too general, too long, and the statement seems to put growth before environment. The lack of commitment to environmental protection, preservation and sustainable/manageable growth were also key concerns. Additionally, participants noted the lack of social indicators of health – no mention of jobs, affordability, or health of people.

Participants of the survey and visioning session were also asked what the headline of a newspaper would say about the Township of Muskoka Lakes in the year 2040. Participant responses were mostly positive, however there was some concern for the ability to achieve the status of the Township in the

headlines they submitted. Participant responses were a mix of positive and negative headlines – where they shared hoped for positive and feared the negative. Key themes from the positive responses included maintaining the Township’s beauty, history, Muskoka character, and environmental health, especially with regards to clean, pristine lakes. Keywords that were used included that the Township is an oasis, vibrant, a treasure/gem, and is the best nationally/globally and setting an example to other municipalities. Key themes from the negative responses included concern of affordability in the Township, environmental deterioration (i.e. pollution, deforestation and flooding), and over-development.

At the community visioning session, participants were asked to answer a series of questions and group their responses into themes to identify key ingredients to incorporate into the revised vision statement. The key vision ingredients from the activity included:

- Youth retention
- Sustainable economy
- Protect quality of lakes and natural amenities/environmental protection
- Climate change resilience
- Sustainable growth
- Leadership
- Environment First principle – backbone of the Township
- Quality of life for residents – social wellbeing
- Preserving character of the town

Additionally, survey participants were asked to describe what they love about Muskoka Lakes. New themes that arose from their responses included:

- Quiet, peaceful, calm
- Family and friends, multi-generational
- Environment (i.e. water, rocks, trees, lakes, starry skies, wildlife, etc.)
- Beauty of the natural environment

Key Issues

At the community visioning session, participants were asked to identify the key issues in the Township of Muskoka Lakes. Through the online survey, participants were asked to rank the following items in order of importance (where 1 is the most important, and 9 is the least important):

- Ability to support recreational visitors
- Climate change and relatable impacts (e.g. flooding)
- Development and operation of resorts
- Development/increasing density
- Parking and transportation
- Preservation of the character of Muskoka Lakes
- Protection of the lakes, rivers and water quality
- Protection of the natural environment and green space
- Walkability in core areas

The results of the survey are presented in Figure 1 (below). The items rated as highest importance were the environmental items: protection of the lakes, rivers and water quality (average rating of 2.49), protection of the natural environment and green space (average rating of 3.44), and climate change and related impacts (3.91). Participants were also asked if they had concerns that were not included in the list. Key themes from their responses included: affordable housing; short-term rental housing; boat traffic and safety; noise from transportation (boating, air traffic, trucks) and lake recreation; pollution, local jobs/economy; and, the size of new developments. While “ability to support recreational visitors” was not identified as a top priority (average rating of 6.28), participants frequently referenced concerns with over-development on lakes and over-crowding in the comments.

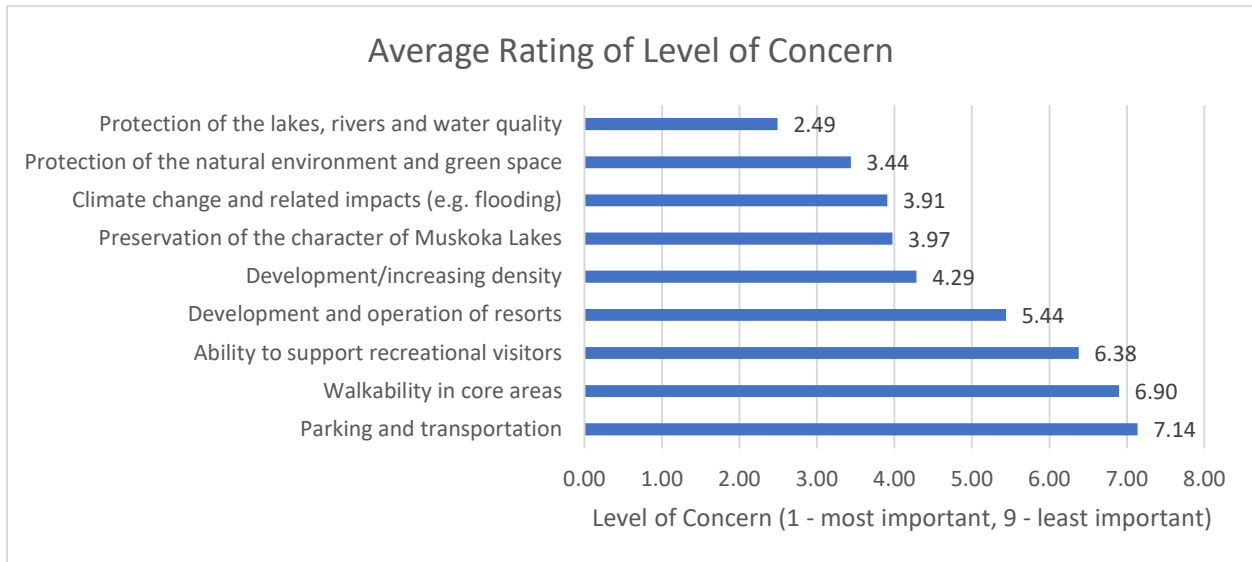


Figure 2: Average rating of the level of concern for these items in the Township of Muskoka Lakes from survey participants. n=751 (where 1 is the most important, and 9 is the least important)

Key themes that arose from the discussion at the community visioning session included preserving water quality and protecting the watershed, and climate change. Development concerns were related to environmental protection, but attendees also highlighted concerns regarding commercial and short-term lake-front rental properties, including lack of awareness for the rules of the lake and sanitation procedures, and lack of regulation from the Township. Additional key themes related to quality of life, such as poverty (lack of affordable housing, lack of full-time permanent jobs) and concerns regarding access to healthcare. Other issues included the loss of indigenous heritage, youth retention, and respect between full-time and part-time residents.

Supporting a Thriving Economy

Participants of the community vision session and online survey were asked for suggestions to encourage economic growth, while protecting the natural environment and unique character of Muskoka. Key themes from their responses included:

- Investing in high-speed internet and broadband
- Attracting tourism to town/city centres and away from the waterfront
- Offering year-round eco-tourism and sustainable tourism opportunities
- Become a local food destination

- Invest in arts and culture by offering classes and hosting festivals
- Introduce a tourism tax to accommodations industries (i.e. AirBnb, resorts, restaurants, etc.) that would be used to preserve the local character and environment of Muskoka Lakes
- Invest in environmental protection which would create employment opportunities
- Introduce educational opportunities (i.e. community colleges/a satellite campus) that would focus on service industries and trades
- Invest in green energy/technology
- Attract the technology industry
- Support local businesses and entrepreneurship
- Supporting better access to Muskoka Lakes through train/bus services
- Developing retirement homes and long-term care facilities

Participants also shared that by addressing affordable housing concerns this would attract young families and entrepreneurs to the Township, in addition to offering living wages for current job opportunities. Participants also mentioned promoting Muskoka Lakes as a year-round destination. There was concern regarding over-development/exploitation of resources to support economic growth, and participants suggested instead focusing on how to capitalize on low-carbon tourism such as safe bike lanes for cycling tourism, gravel trail cycling, and hiking. Participants mentioned exploring what Mont Tremblant, Fogo Island, and Aspen do to attract tourists.

Demographic Information

Survey participants were given the option to share demographic information at the end of the survey. When asked what the participant’s relationship to the Township of Muskoka Lakes is, they were asked to select all that applied from a pre-determined list of options. The results are presented in Figure 3 below. Those who selected “other” identified themselves as cottagers, full-time residents from multiple generations in the Township, residents from near-by communities (i.e. Bracebridge, Seguin, etc.) and owners of rental properties.

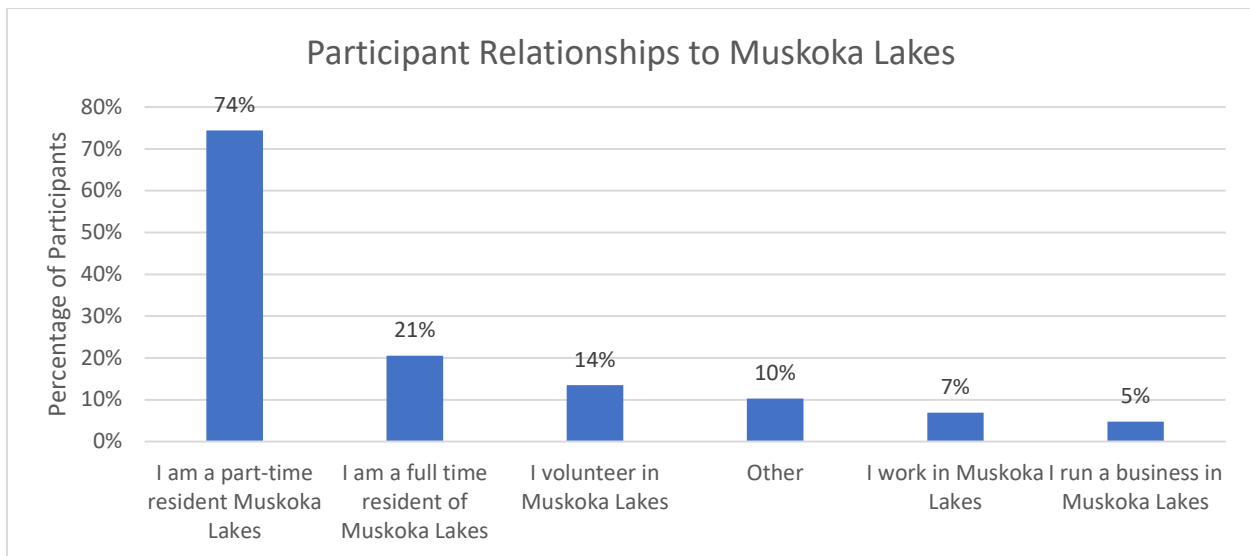


Figure 1: Survey participants' relationship to the Township of Muskoka Lakes. n=711

Participants were also asked to identify their age within a given age range. The results are presented in Figure 4 below. Almost 80% of survey participants were over the age of 55 (38% between aged 55 and 64, and 39% indicating the age 65 or older).

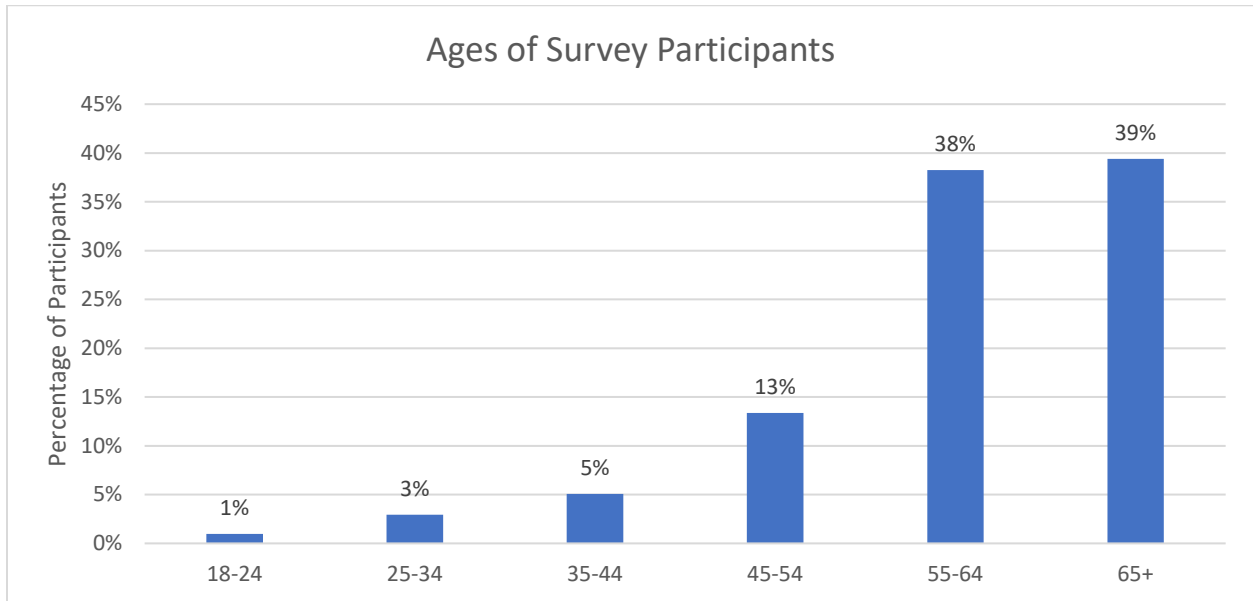


Figure 2: Survey participants' ages. n=711

Planning Committee Meeting Feedback

On Friday, August 16, the Township of Muskoka Lakes Planning Committee hosted a public meeting to discuss the Official Plan and Review. The meeting was attended by Jim Dymont of Municipal Planning. At the session, there were many comments in opposition of density on the water, preserving the character of the shoreline and issues about condominium ownership. Key themes included:

- Reconsider 'grandfathering' provisions for existing buildings
- Limit dock sizes and boathouses
- Require staff housing on commercial sites
- Develop architectural guidelines for waterfront
- Increase by-law enforcement
- Special consideration for small lakes (regarding recreational capacity)
- Intensify uses in the urban areas
- Have guidelines in the Official Plan

Additionally, members of Council discussed affordable housing and need for employment as priorities.

Next Steps

What we heard from this phase of engagement will be used to inform the draft community vision statements, and the draft policy directions to be consulted in during the next engagement phase (Spring 2020).