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December 9, 2020

Mayor Carol Moffatt, Township of Algonquin Highlands

Reeve Bert Liverance, Township of the Archipelago

Mayor Graydon Smith, Town of Bracebridge

Mayor Peter Koetsier Township of Georgian Bay

Mayor Paul Kelly, Town of Gravenhurst

Mayor Karin Terziano, Town of Huntsville

Mayor Terry Glover, Township of Lake of Bays

President Erin Hadaway, Moon River Metis

Chief Barron King, Moose Deer Point First Nation

District Chair John Klinck, District of Muskoka

Chief Philip Franks, Wahta Mohawks

Dear Municipal Leaders impacted by the Muskoka River Water Management Plan,

As you are all well aware, since the creation and implementation of the Muskoka River Water Management Plan (MRWMP), our lakes and rivers have experienced flooding far more frequently than under the prior water management plan. Based on my review of the MRWMP, my understanding is that in some instances, not only have spring high water levels been "raised", but equally if not more important, winter draw down levels have also been raised (more water is being kept in the system). As a case in point, the winter draw down level of Lake Muskoka (the largest lake basin across the watershed), is almost 8" higher than the water level in the previous plan. Similarly, the spring water level is over 3" higher than in the previous plan. The difference between the low of the old plan and the high of the MRWMP is just under 1 foot! Without needing a PHD in hydrology, it strikes me that this could be one of the single largest factors contributing to the flooding of our shoreline communities. Combine this planned increase in total volume of water in the system with impacts of climate change and one can easily conclude that flooding will occur more and more frequently unless changes to the operating parameters of the plan occur.

The devastation caused in 2019 across our watershed highlighted this problem, however staff and elected officials at the MNRF continue to ignore repeated requests to review and address the situation. For those of you who attended the recent MRWMP Communications Committee Zoom meeting last week, I am sure you will agree that this committee is more about a show or appearance of doing something, versus actually making changes.

The Muskoka Watershed Advisory Group (commissioned through the Premier and the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP)) has made a number of recommendations to address our entire watershed. That group identified the immediate need to update the Muskoka River Water Management Plan. Between the Township of Muskoka Lakes and the District of Muskoka, no less than 8 resolutions have been passed requesting that the Province identify limitations within our watershed (for moving water faster through the system), as well as evaluating options for changes to the plan, in order to mitigate flooding across our watershed.

In a teleconference meeting with the Premier, Minister Yakabuski (MNRF), Minister Yurek (MECP) and our MPP Norm Miller on November 24th, 2020, I once again raised these issues about our watershed, along with a specific request to begin the process of immediately amending the MRWMP to accommodate climate change and protect the residents. For those of you on the Communications Committee call last week, clearly the messages I raised with the Ministers and the Premier were not passed onto MNRF staff. It even appeared that Minister Yakabuski felt his job was done just by setting up this meeting and as such left the meeting after the introductions.

My observation is that when the Premier is aware and involved with issues, solutions are sought in order to move things forward. However, when Ministers are left to their own devices, they and their various ministerial bureaucracies often get in the way and the very real concerns of those affected locally are ignored. Recognizing this, I have drafted the attached letter to the Premier, copying Ministers Yakabuski, Yurek and Clark, highlighting our issues and requesting specific action. If this letter contained ALL of our signatures, it would demonstrate our combined belief about the causes and significance of this issue, as well as the impact on our various communities. If you are in support, all I ask is that you, or anyone from your administrative staff forward a copy of your digital signature to my attention so the attached letter can be sent. Again, assuming you agree then I will endeavour to send the letter by the middle of next week (or sooner) but I need your electronic signature first.

At this point I am hoping our joint letter will be enough to move things along at Queens Park. Should this approach not at least start the process, then a more public display of our dissatisfaction with this lack of interest may be appropriate. Hopefully we don't have to get to this point – but stay tuned.

I am happy to discuss this with any of you at any point and am also hopeful that we can all support one another on this matter.

Have a great day and I look forward to your support with your electronic signature for our joint correspondence.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Phil Harding', written in a cursive style.

Phil Harding
Mayor Township of Muskoka Lakes
pharding@muskokalakes.ca