

November 11, 2020

Members of the Municipal Modernization Committee
District of Muskoka
70 Pine Street
Bracebridge, ON
P1L 1N3

Dear Committee Members,

Re: District Council Composition Review

We are writing on behalf of Friends of Muskoka and the Muskoka Lakes Association on the issue of District Council composition. We understand that the public will have a future opportunity to comment on this issue but felt it important to weigh in before a resolution is passed that might gain momentum and be difficult to undo.

We would like to address two issues: the number of seats on District Council, and weighted voting.

Number of District Council Seats

We agree with the philosophy espoused by several members of the Municipal Modernization Committee (MMC) at your November 4th meeting that all lower tier (LT) municipalities be allowed a fair voice in District Council decisions. We believe that this can be achieved with either:

- a. 12-member Council (2 members per LT municipality), plus District Chair;
- b. 18-member Council (3 members per LT municipality), plus District Chair; or,
- c. 14-member Council (3 from TML and Huntsville and 2 from each of the other 4), plus District Chair.

Option a. has the benefit of a significant reduction in Council members which may make meetings more efficient; however, it puts an extra burden on each Council member as they will all need to sit on more committees. This may be particularly problematic for the Mayor whose primary responsibility is to work in and represent their local municipality. It also brings fewer voices to the table from geographically large, diverse lower tier municipalities.

Option b. mitigates the drawbacks of Option a. while providing some efficiency gains through a smaller Council.

Option c. allows for efficiency gains, more councillors to populate committees and gives the two most populous municipalities a larger voice – one representing a Town and one a Township.

Weighted Voting

What is more problematic is the concept of weighted voting. This is not consistent with the philosophy of a fair voice for all municipalities as it will favour some lower tier municipalities over others on issues when it is invoked.

Furthermore, determining the population of lower tier municipalities by using the Environics data, even averaged with the Second Home Study data, is troubling. Valid issues with the Environics data were raised at the MMC meeting last week. This data excludes international residents, a not insignificant portion of the seasonal resident population, particularly in the Townships. The results yielded an estimated doubling of the seasonal population of Huntsville vs the Second Home Study calculation and, as Mayor Harding pointed out, the study estimated that a significant portion of seasonal residents in the Towns reside in homes that have been designated as permanent residences. No explanation was provided for these anomalies.

As Environics' methodology counts people whose cell phones "reside" in a home for up to 180 days per year, one possible explanation is that this methodology caught permanent residents who are away at school or who leave the District for a substantial part of the year. These residents are included in the permanent population census, so they would be counted twice in the Environics count. The Environics methodology also includes people who visit Muskoka (short term rental or cottage visitors) for more than 20 days per year. These individuals are specifically excluded from the Second Home Study population estimates.

Without acceptable resolution of these issues, it is our recommendation that the Environics data set not be considered an accurate count of seasonal residents and should not be averaged with another data set.

Given the difficulty of calculating an accurate seasonal resident count, we believe the fairest option is majority voting. Majority voting is simpler and in keeping with the intent of the equalization of representation on District Council. We are in favour of a majority or supermajority vote on Council as suggested by Mayor Terziano. A super-majority or 2/3rds for important issues should be considered. It is simple, fair and preferable to a tie breaking vote by the District Chair since it will result in discussion and compromise amongst councillors as a majority will be required to resolve issues of importance for the District.

Thank you for allowing us to weigh in on this important matter.

Respectfully submitted,



Deborah Martin-Downs
President, Muskoka Lakes Association



Laurie Thomson
President, Friends of Muskoka

cc. Amy Back, District Clerk