

November 13, 2023

District Municipality of Muskoka  
70 Pine Street  
Bracebridge, ON  
P1L 1N3

**Attention: District Council**

Dear Chair Lehman and Members of Council:

**Re: November 20, 2023 Council Meeting –  
Approval of Township of Muskoka Lakes Official Plan**

A number of community associations and groups, including the Muskoka Lakes Association, the Friends of Muskoka, the Muskoka Small Lakes Coalition and the Skeleton Lake Cottagers Organization, as well as many concerned constituents, have worked with the Township of Muskoka Lakes (“TML” or “the Township”) over the past four years to assist in the development of their new Official Plan (“OP”). The process at the Township level was exhaustive, lengthy and enjoyed extensive participation by individual constituents, lake associations, business interests and other interested parties. The Township adopted policies in its OP that recognize its lakes and waterways as key to its economic growth and wellbeing and prioritized language to protect them.

Approval of TML's Official Plan, passed by the Township Council in October 2023, will be considered for approval at the District Council meeting on November 20, 2023.

**In short, we are asking Council to approve the TML Official Plan in its current form without modification.** This will allow the Township to proceed with the important work around drafting by-laws in order that the full effect of the OP can come into force.

TML OP's Two Limitations on New Aggregate Operations

There are two key features of TML's OP dealing with the creation of new aggregate operations that we expect will be topics of discussion in the November 20, 2023 Council meeting.

Firstly, the OP calls for a 2km buffer between a water body and a new aggregate operation. Secondly the OP calls for a new aggregate operation to be in close proximity to a provincial highway, and this is defined as being no more than 10km.

The 2km buffer has been enshrined in TML's OP for a long time. We see no need or reason to change this long standing policy that has served the Township well. The Township's new OP adopts a precautionary approach to guide development decisions. The growing body of evidence of the harmful effects of aggregate operations, including issues around noise, air quality, dust, environmental concerns, water quality concerns and community character, all require the precautionary approach be taken when considering a disruptive



and large site such as an aggregate operation. We believe the limitations on aggregate operations adopted by TML Council are the precautionary approach.

The need for close proximity to a provincial highway is common sense (traffic concerns, safety concerns, noise concerns, wear and tear on District and Township roads, community character, air quality concerns from dust and exhaust etc), and there needs to be a quantified definition around what close proximity means, otherwise the concept of close proximity becomes meaningless.

TML Council approved these two limitations in order to protect water quality, protect the character of communities, protect the economic driver of the Township and to address the potential air quality issues coming from aggregate operations.

To clarify, the economic success of the Township and arguably the entire District depends on a healthy environment, with clean lakes and natural treed shorelines that entice seasonal and permanent residents to invest and live in Muskoka and attract tourists to the area. These residents and tourists support the retail, accommodation, construction and trades industries in Muskoka and are part of the fabric of the community. Significant aggregate operations that threaten to diminish the experience on the lakes represent a clear threat to Muskoka's economy.

#### Draft Provincial Policy Statement

We have had several discussions with District planning staff about the aggregates section of TML's OP. We understand that in their professional capacity they cannot support prohibiting new aggregate operations within 2km of the waterfront, nor can they support requiring new aggregate operations to be within 10km of a provincial highway. The reasons cited are based on the new draft Provincial Policy Statement ("PPS") encouraging the proliferation of aggregate operations.

However, we believe it is still open to Council to support TML Council's decision to adopt limitations on aggregate operations, for the following reasons:

- Firstly, the new draft PPS is only in draft form at present, and we have no information as to when or even if it will be adopted. It's very possible the Province may not move quickly on this in light of other development issues that are currently of major concern.
- Secondly, the PPS enables the District to find the balance between competing interests in a manner that reflects local needs and characteristics. We believe that in the context of Muskoka, this is a pivotal consideration. Muskoka is a jewel in the Province's crown, and it depends on its unspoiled natural beauty and tranquility for its economic success. Aggregate operations close to the waterfront threaten the quality of the water in our lakes, the air quality in the surrounding communities, the experience of residents and tourists, and the economic base of TML and the District.
- Thirdly, the language in the new TML OP is consistent with the current PPS, which allows local municipalities to prioritize protection of the environment and important drivers of the local economy. Section 2.5.2.2 of the current PPS states: 'Extraction shall be undertaken in a manner which minimizes social, economic and environmental impacts'. TML Council has determined that

minimizing these impacts in the Township requires aggregate operations to have a 2km buffer from the waterfront, and be no more than 10km from a provincial highway.

- Lastly, a noted purpose of the District Official Plan (in section A3(b)) is to “implement the Provincial Policy Statement at the District level in a manner that is intended to reflect the Muskoka context to the greatest extent possible while being consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement’. We believe there is no conflict between this provision and the comments and recommendations in this letter.

Economic Cost of Aggregate Operations in Muskoka

Some might put forward the argument for the potential economic benefit that an aggregates operation will bring to the District/Township. We feel this argument is weak at best – more likely not at all supported. Statistics Canada (2021) reports that employment in the aggregate and mining sector makes up only 0.1 per cent of the employment in the District whereas retail trade and accommodation comprise 25.5 per cent of all employment. Further, aggregate operations pay very low property taxes. And relative to the marginal costs incurred by the municipality/district for road repair and maintenance, even many years of property taxes paid by an aggregate operation won’t resurface even a few km’s of roadway. This leads to a basic unfairness relative to other taxpayers in the municipality who will be paying the freight for inevitably higher road maintenance and resurfacing costs that these operations bring. It also could be viewed as an example of a municipality subsidizing a provincial policy directive, if “close proximity” is not contained to be a quantifiable and reasonable distance.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,



Susan Eplett  
President,  
Muskoka Lakes Association



Laurie Thomson  
President,  
Friends of Muskoka



Jeff Crocker  
President,  
Skeleton Lake  
Cottagers Organization



Mark Scarrow  
Muskoka Small  
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Cc: Amy Back, District Clerk

Lisa Marden, Director of Planning, District of Muskoka

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