

February 6, 2024

Town of Bracebridge
1000 Taylor Court,
Bracebridge ON P1L 1R6

Attention: Planning Department and Official Plan Review Working Group

Dear Director Kelley and Manager Holmes,

Re: Bracebridge Official Plan Review – Policy Directions

The Muskoka Lakes Association (“MLA”) and Friends of Muskoka (“FOM”) offer the comments below regarding the proposed Policy Directions for the Bracebridge Official Plan review. Our comments have been grouped into two categories:

1. Environmental Stewardship; and
2. Responsible Development.

Environmental Stewardship

Environmental Stewardship is one of five key goals identified in Bracebridge’s 2018-2028 Strategic Plan (BSP). The goal states:

“The natural environment is our crown jewel. It’s what attracts people from all over and makes them want to stay here.”

In December of 2020, Muskoka District Council officially declared a Climate Emergency, and closely following that, the Town of Bracebridge declared a Climate Emergency in July of 2021. The District of Muskoka, in collaboration with five of its six Area Municipalities (AMs), including Bracebridge, created Muskoka’s Regional Climate Change Adaptation Plan (ReCAP) in 2023. The ReCAP vision statement is for:

“Muskoka [to] be a progressive and resilient leader in the increasingly urgent need to adapt to changing climate conditions, ensuring the protection of the natural environment and prosperous communities.”

The Town of Bracebridge was one of the hardest hit Muskoka AMs in the unprecedented floods of 2019. The ReCAP has identified Water Energy and Conservation, and Integrated Watershed Management as key to flood mitigation and adaptation plans. Canada’s National Adaptation Strategy has identified improving systemic resilience across nature and biodiversity as one of its five key focus areas to defend against increasingly extreme weather events.

For Bracebridge and Muskoka, the MLA and FOM believe that the economy is linked to the natural environment, and the protection of their natural environment is fundamental to

fostering a thriving economy. Thus, the MLA and FOM strongly support all policy directions to implement Environmental Stewardship and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation.

In support of Environmental Stewardship, the MLA and FOM would propose the following policy directions:

1. Adopt an Environment First principle to inform all Official Plan (OP) goals and objectives
2. Ensure environmental protection is a priority in the Town's operations and plans (BSP p 9 and ReCAP p 40)
3. Broaden public engagement in environmental initiatives, especially including partnerships with local Indigenous peoples, to help lead Environmental Stewardship vision and implementation (BSP p 9 and ReCAP p 40)
4. Protect lakes, rivers, wetlands, forests, including the urban forest, natural and sensitive habitats, species at risk, and biodiversity (ReCAP pp 9, 11)
5. Incorporate policy supporting the development of an Integrated Watershed Management plan and revisions to the Muskoka River Water Management Plan to ensure the cumulative impacts of future development are taken into consideration (Muskoka Watershed Advisory Group 2020 and Muskoka Watershed Council)
6. Implement the ReCAP's objective to apply a low carbon resilience lens (LCR) which integrates mitigation (actions to reduce emissions that cause Climate Change) to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and adaptation (actions to manage impacts of Climate Change), to reduce vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate change (ReCAP p 10)

Responsible Growth, Development, Economic Expansion

The MLA and FOM support a thriving urban centre in Bracebridge. The urban, waterfront and rural areas of Muskoka are all important to one another, and their mutual benefit should be promoted and enhanced. A vibrant Bracebridge is as important to waterfront and rural dwellers, as is the shared enjoyment of the waterfront and forest to urban dwellers in Bracebridge.

In concert with a number of objectives identified in Bracebridge's Strategic Plan and the ReCAP, the MLA and FOM support policies:

1. Incorporating the Town's Strategic Plan objectives into the OP to ensure the Town's planning practices, policies and processes lead to responsible growth and development, specifically by defining Environmental Stewardship as a framework to guide all development proposals and planning decisions.

2. Applying a “Climate Change Lens” to maximize resiliency of ecosystems and communities, manage the risks associated with climate change, and provide ecosystem services for future generations (Muskoka Corporate Climate Change Action Plan (MCCAP p 16).
3. Protecting locally, regionally and provincially significant areas and features and preserving them to maintain the long-term integrity and the special character of the Muskoka environment (MCCAP p 18).
4. Defining complete communities, including attainable housing, accessible greenspaces, protected natural and cultural environments and local employment (BSP p 10, Town of Bracebridge Official Plan Review Background Discussion Paper, pp 41-44).
5. Avoiding rural areas, floodplains, wetlands, and forested lands for development (ReCAP p 43).
6. Promoting the natural environment, including local agri-tourism, as a year-round destination for tourists and visitors (BSP p 8, ReCAP p 40, p 46).
7. Improving mineral resources and aggregates management, to allow sustainable operations in the long term as an important economic activity for Bracebridge and Muskoka, including increasing requirements for impact mitigation of these activities on human health and the environment, and by giving greater weight to economic justification of these operations based on evidenced supply and demand equations, to the greatest extent possible at the municipal level (see recommendations, Auditor General of Ontario Audit Report - Management of Aggregate resources, December 2023) .

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our comments, which we hope are helpful.

Sincerely,



Susan Eplett
President,
Muskoka Lakes Association



Laurie Thomson
President,
Friends of Muskoka

Cc: Nick McDonald, Meridian Planning Consultants
Donna Hinde, The Planning Partnership
Tatiana Sutherland, District Councillor
Andrew Struthers, Macaulay Ward Councillor
Barb McMurray, Oakley Ward Councillor
Steve Clement, Committee of Adjustment for Minor Variance Representative
Susan Flemming, Committee of Adjustment for Consent Representative