



Resorts Conversion Issue Catches Fire!

Muskoka residents are waking up, and speaking out, to oppose a misguided District proposal that would create new high-density communities on precious Muskoka waterfront. You may have received some of the many letters, from the MLA and others, alerting ratepayers to this threat. The MLA first raised these concerns earlier this year, worried that developers are using Muskokans' longtime affection for traditional resorts to push for new rules that will change our waterfront forever.

In a nutshell, the District is proposing to allow resorts – which have traditionally accommodated visitors to Muskoka, not residents – to sell up to half of their units as year-round family homes. Theoretically, the other half of their units would still be considered commercial – but only in the sense that their owners would be required to make them available to rent for as little as eight to 10 weeks each year.

The MLA's primary concern is that high-density year-round residences will be built under the guise of being a resort. A secondary concern is that local municipalities would have no way of enforcing or monitoring compliance, which suggests these "resorts" would inevitably become full-time residential communities.

What's the problem with these new waterfront developments? Muskoka has always prided itself on its pristine, unspoiled waterfront. Residential development is regulated tightly through zoning rules that ensure minimum lot frontages (usually 200 to 300 feet) and minimum setbacks, and encourage responsible shoreline stewardship. Based in part on their traditional role as small, family-owned recreational centres, resorts have long enjoyed an exemption from such restrictions. Now developers want to take advantage of resorts' special development rights to build large residential compounds in place of rustic resorts.

There will be two additional chances for the public to voice their opinions on this issue: a November 23rd public meeting on the new draft Official Plan (OP) itself, at the district offices in Bracebridge; and a follow-up District Planning committee meeting, devoted solely to the resorts issue, to be held early in 2018.

We continue to stress the importance of letting your Mayor and District councillors know how wrong-headed this resort-conversion policy is. See the MLA website for more background information on this topic and a full list of politicians to send letters/emails to expressing your disapproval. The MLA link can be found [here](#):

Try to attend the Thursday, November 23rd 9 a.m. public meeting held at the District Council Chambers, 70 Pine Street, Bracebridge. Let the politicians know how worried you are about the degradation of Muskoka's waterfront!

***The MLA will be delegating at the November 23rd meeting.
COME JOIN US AND MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD!!***

DISTRICT OF MUSKOKA

Update on District's proposed new Official Plan Resort Policies – The District recently completed a 2nd draft of its new Official Plan, which was presented to the District Planning Committee on October 19th. Most discussion focused on the resort policies issue.

The District is proposing that resorts be allowed up to 50% residential units. Developers want this flexibility in order to evade the zoning controls that normally restrict residential development. The District is receiving pushback from the public, including the MLA, concerned this will cause high-density development on the waterfront that would jeopardize water quality and waterfront character. On Oct. 19, the MLA was relieved to see new pushback on this issue by several councillors.

All four Township of Muskoka Lakes District councillors attended this meeting. Councillor Phil Harding said he has been contacted by hundreds of residents concerned about the resort policies. Councillor Harding spoke passionately about the dangers of allowing 50% of commercial units to be residential, and questioned the rationale behind this proposal. He felt strongly that policies needed to be much more restrictive at the District level. Councillor Allen Edwards, who sits on the planning committee, said he opposes the 50-50 proposal, and that it will lead to overuse of the lakes and reduced water quality. Rather than bowing to developers' demands, he said the District should adopt the policy: "If you don't like our rules, don't come here."

In support of the 50-50 proposal, TML Mayor Don Furniss took a different tack. He suggested the District was being too harsh on developers by requiring commercial units to be rented out for 10 weeks. He thinks eight weeks would be sufficient: "I've never heard anyone say there is a shortage of rental accommodation in the summertime." The MLA is not surprised by this stance, but we are very disappointed.

Given ongoing division over the resort policy, the Planning Committee decided to hold **an additional meeting in January or February to specifically discuss the resort policies.** It was noted that this would push the final adoption of the OP back a few months.

Next Steps – The next opportunity for public comment on the proposed OP will be held Thursday, November 23rd at 9 a.m. in District Council Chambers, Bracebridge. Note that you do not have to register to speak at this meeting. Written public comments can be submitted up to the end of January 2018.

Click here for the staff report on the OP changes and the revised 2nd Draft, with all changes highlighted [here](#):

Here is the link to the recorded webcast of the meeting [here](#).

The discussion on the draft Official Plan goes from 38:50 to 2:01:46. The full discussion on the draft OP took an hour and 20 minutes. *(Note it takes a minute to load visuals)*

Highlights of the webcast include:

TML Councillor Phil Harding - starts at 59:01 (about 10 minutes)

TML Councillor Allen Edwards – starts at 1:14:40 (about 4 minutes)

TML Mayor Don Furniss - starts at 1:49:49 (about 2 minutes)

The MLA is pleased that District's planning committee recognizes the concerns surrounding the resort policies. We appreciate that there will now be another meeting to explore these policies. The MLA will let you know when the January/February meeting is scheduled.

Update on District Council Composition – District Council recently established a Council Composition Review Committee and hired a consultant to facilitate discussions and prepare a report. On October 5th, approximately a dozen members of the public attended a District public meeting to provide comments regarding the appropriate number of District councillors. After taking the public's comments, and reviewing the consultant's report, the committee was to present a final recommendation to District Council. Instead, committee scheduled a follow-up meeting on October 23rd. Discussion centered on two key issues: the definition of a resident (i.e., no longer weighting year-round residents higher than seasonal residents), and how to acquire accurate population data (to determine representation by population).

Committee concluded that a final recommendation on future council composition could not be made by December 31st of this year, as it had planned. As a result, any changes will not affect next year's municipal election. Committee agreed to continue researching and preparing documentation to help the next District council make a decision on this issue.

The consultant's Final Report /Recommendation for a reduced 19-member council can be found [here](#): *The MLA attended all these meetings. The MLA delegated on this matter at District Council on October 16th. Our letter can be found [here](#): The MLA is pleased that an issue of this importance is not being rushed and that committee will continue discussions on this. We are also pleased to hear that committee is recommending that all residents (seasonal and permanent) be given equal weighting.*

Flood Plain Mapping Update – In response to the unprecedented flooding events of the past few years, the District is undertaking flood-plain mapping. It has received a Federal grant of \$450,000 towards the full project amount of \$900,000. Six engineering firms have submitted estimates to complete the mapping work within the two-year timeline. The successful applicant will be announced in November. To date the District has not received any funding commitment from the Province, so the District may be forced to use reserve funds.

District now Webcasts all Council and Committee Meetings –Interested in attending a District meeting but can't find time to make that trip to Bracebridge? You can now attend via the web. The District has launched its new webcasting option for all council and committee meetings. All public meetings are now streamed live, recorded and are available to view [here](#): All recorded meetings will be archived for six months, and the public will be able to access those past meetings at their convenience. *The MLA commends the District's initiative to increase the public's ability to observe council decision-making.*

TOWN OF BRACEBRIDGE

Have Your Say on the Future Plans for Bracebridge –The Town is currently reviewing its Strategic Plan. Work began on this project in September with input sessions and public meetings. The Town is now encouraging all members of the community – full-time residents, seasonal residents, seniors, students, etc. – to complete an online survey. Your input will help create the plan to guide Bracebridge's future for the next 10 years. The 15-minute survey can be found [here](#). A consultant will assemble all ideas and prepare a draft plan to be considered by council in January 2018. Updates can be

found on the project website [here](#). *The MLA hopes all our Bracebridge members will let the Town know your thoughts and ideas.*

TOWN OF GRAVENHURST

Muskoka Regional Centre Update- Negotiations to allow for the transfer of the long-dormant Regional Centre property to Maple Leaf Schools began in June 2016. On October 5th, Gravenhurst Mayor Paisley Donaldson announced that negotiations have come to an impasse between the Town, Infrastructure Ontario and Maple Leaf School Systems/Knightstone Capital Management. Gravenhurst CAO Glen Davies said the latest roadblock seemed to be the province's insistence on an anti-flipping clause, which would prevent the purchaser from selling off any part of the property for 20 years. (Residential unit sales are part of Maple Leaf's plan for the property.) Council has been actively working with Maple Leaf Schools to help redevelop the 70-acre property which has sat dormant for 25 years. District Council at its October 16th meeting unanimously supported a motion to confirm its support of the Gravenhurst project and request Premier Wynne's direct involvement. See the following news stories about this issue [here](#) and [here](#):

The MLA supports the redevelopment of this prime waterfront property, so long as the Town of Gravenhurst does not incur any costs which would be borne by the taxpayers. The MLA understands that if residential dwellings are being proposed, the site will require rezoning with full public input.

Gravenhurst's revised Sign By-law – This summer council directed staff to review its Sign By-law and make amendments regarding signage, including illuminated signs, special-event signs, menu boards, and even cottage-association signs. Deputy Mayor Jeff Watson said "The goal of this by-law is to improve the aesthetics of the Town." Two amendments are of special note to MLA members:

1. Cottage Signs - Individual name signs would be considered under the Incidental Sign definition in the By-law. These signs would not require a permit, but **would not be permitted on trees or utility poles**. If a group of owners or a cottage association propose a larger combined sign, a permit may now be required.
2. Dark Sky Compliance - Staff have **added very strict dark sky protection language** into the new Sign By-law. The By-law prohibits commercial lighting fixtures that do not comply with the Dark Sky By-law.

Councillor Heidi Lorenz questioned not allowing cottage name signs on trees, as these signs are quite different than business signs. "That's the charm of Muskoka. Aren't we taking this too far?" Council passed the new By-law on October 24th. Staff will be posting information on the website to explain the permit process. The staff report on the Sign By-law can be found [here](#):

SEGUIN TOWNSHIP

Councillor Jack Hepworth's October Council and Community Reports – The MLA took note of:

- a) Seguin's financial report from Chief Financial Officer Michele Fraser who states "We are currently forecasting a surplus of just over \$44,000, up \$9,000 from the \$34,965 reported on July 28th."
- b) The building permit revenues collected to September 30, 2017 are \$216,894.00 compared to \$242,983.00 collected to September 30, 2016. Building department staff are projecting a shortfall of approximately \$50,000 by year end. While the number of permits is relatively stable compared to previous years, the value of those permits is less, which indicates many smaller projects than in previous years.

- c) Rosseau Lake College has appointed a new Head - Dr. Robert Careau. See the interview with him in Councillor Hepworth's newsletter.

The MLA thanks Councillor Hepworth for keeping everyone informed of council and community happenings. His latest detailed report can be found here: www.jackhepworth.ca

TOWNSHIP OF MUSKOKA LAKES (TML)

New Plans Unveiled for massive Resort Village in Minett – Developer Ken Fowler Enterprises (KFE), along with its planning agent Planscape, presented revised plans for the Resort Village of Minett on October 14th to a crowd of nearly 100 people at Clevelands House. In 2007, through an Official Plan Amendment, KFE received approval in principle for the development of the new Resort Village of Minett. **The developer told the crowd that the first phase will consist of constructing approximately 1,400 units. If 1,400 units are built, this will exceed the number of units in Port Carling and Bala combined.** The plan proposes a mix of commercial and residential units along the waterfront between Clevelands House and the Marriott Hotel. (Note: The 43 proposed cottages at Lakeside Lodge/Legacy Cottages are not included in the project, or in the Resort Village designation.) The Resort Village would be developed on publicly owned water and sewer facilities. The developer would build and pay for the treatment plants. When they are operational, the District would take over their ownership and operation.

Not all of the details are available yet. The commercial core will be located at the marina with shops and restaurants all clustered around the docks. The developers noted that the density of the first phase will be far less than originally proposed by the late Ken Fowler, the founder of the project, and approved a decade ago by TML council under then-mayor Susan Pryke.

The MLA was involved in the original OP proposal and demanded, and received, some concessions, but as the whole project depended on the construction of a public sewage treatment plant by KFE, no further action was taken until now. Detailed plans of this proposed development can be found [here](#): ***This development would mark a major change in Muskoka's waterfront character. The MLA is currently analyzing the proposal and requesting further information from the developer's planner. We expect these plans these plans will be presented to TML council sometime in 2018.***

Local Resident Requests TML to define the term 'Residence' in Official Plans – In a personal delegation related to the resort-conversion issue mentioned above, a Minett resident questioned why the District of Muskoka has defined what a resort is but has not defined what constitutes a "residence." He requested that TML ask the District to add a definition of 'residence' to its draft Official Plan so as to identify what differentiates a "residential" unit in a hybrid-resort development from a standard "commercial" resort unit. Neither the District nor the Township official plans define 'residence'. This would be helpful in drafting condominium agreements for resorts in TML; specifically for Villas of Lake Muskoka, Touchstone and Lakeside Lodge/Legacy Cottages.

The District has made it clear in its agreement with the Villas that the condominium units "shall not constitute the unit owners' residence, and all sale documents shall stipulate that the units cannot be occupied as a residence", but it did not define 'residence'. In response to the delegate's concern, TML planner David Pink has recommended the following definition: "a building or any part thereof that operates as a place of residence for any period of 30 cumulative calendar days or greater throughout all or any part of the calendar year."

The delegate argued that the 30-day minimum is too low. He also commented that the District’s rental requirement for commercial developments is too lenient. The District says a “commercial” resort unit is one that may be available to the travelling public for as little as 8 to 10 weeks a year. In effect, these are residential units posing as “commercial units” solely to receive the more favourable densities that the District grants to commercial resorts.

A decision on this item was deferred and will be returning to Township Committee of the Whole on Thursday, November 16th at 9 a.m. at the township offices. It is expected that many will be watching this development as it impacts the District’s proposed resort policy.

The MLA will be attending the November 16th meeting and will report on the outcome in our next issue of NewsBites.

Proposal to Construct ‘The Canadian Race Boat Hall of Fame’ museum in Port Carling –

Representatives from the Canadian Race Boat Hall of Fame presented TML with their proposal to construct the ‘Hall of Fame’ for racing boats in Port Carling behind the Boatworks building on Indian River, north of the locks. Port Carling was proposed because of its long history and tradition of boat racing. Four of the 18 inductees in the Hall of Fame are boat racers from Muskoka. The organizers expect the building to draw 5,000 visitors each summer. The presenters asked council to endorse the project with a letter of support, to aid in their fundraising efforts. Councillors unanimously agreed. ***The MLA looks forward to reviewing any future plans.***

Proposed Short-Term Rental Licensing By-law – Director of Planning David Pink provided a report and draft by-law aimed at controlling short-term rentals in the township. Highlights of the new by-law include: a definition of short-term accommodation as anything less than 30 consecutive calendar days; no license is required if a property owner rents on an annual basis; a required ‘Renter’s Code’ which outlines behavioral expectations to be signed by the renter and the landlord; detailed plans showing parking and floor plans required to be submitted; owners are responsible to record rental times throughout the year; and a demerit system would be in place that would allow for licenses to be suspended or revoked. Unpaid fees or fines would be transferred to property owner’s tax bills. Councillors discussed the possibility of exempting cottagers who rent out their properties for only a week or two a year.

Mr. Pink outlined the increased demands on administration which included additional staff to process applications, penalties or fines. He noted that current planning staff was not able to handle this extra workload. With a potential 400 rentals in TML, the township would require an additional 3 full-time staff: 1 to administer the license and 2 by-law enforcement officers. Mr. Pink recommended extensive public input on this issue noted this may become contentious. Council felt that further options should be explored and agreed to set up a steering committee with council representation from each ward as follows:

Ward A/ Bala – Councillor Ruth Nishikawa

Ward B/ Windermere, Milford Bay, etc. – Allen Edwards

Ward C/ Port Carling – Jean-Ann Baranik

Mr. Pink’s staff report can be found [here](#):

The draft Licensing By-law can be found [here](#):

The MLA appreciates the efforts of the steering committee to explore all options. Cottagers concerned about this issue should contact their local councillors.

Council Agrees to Sell Port Carling’s ‘Duke House’ – In 2007, TML council under then-mayor Susan Pryke, purchased the historic Duke House on Joseph Street in Port Carling for \$434,000. Since then, it has invested an additional \$458,000 on capital improvements. The property, used as a Visitors’ Centre, is now valued by MPAC at \$197,000. It is clear that TML has invested a substantial amount of money into the Duke House without a great return on its investment. On October 12th, council voted unanimously to declare the lands surplus and directed staff to look at the best option to sell or lease the property. Staff has issued an RFP for a realtor to take on the proposal. ***The MLA is pleased that Township is disposing of an asset that has burdened the taxpayers for years.***

Come Back to Muskoka and enjoy a Santa Claus Parade!

Bala: Sunday November 12, 1 p.m.
Port Carling: Saturday November 18, 6:30 p.m.
Huntsville: Friday November 24, 7 p.m.
Gravenhurst: Saturday November 25, 11 a.m.
Bracebridge: Sunday December 3rd, 1 p.m.
Baysville: Sunday December 10, 1 p.m.