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Chair Bridgeman, Mayor Harding and Members of Council

My name is Deborah Martin-Downs. I am the Chair of the Government and Land Use Committee of the Muskoka Lake Association and a cottager on Lake Muskoka in TML for the past 64 years. The Muskoka Lakes Association represents approximately 2500 families in the Muskoka Lakes with our mission to preserve Muskoka for future generations.

First, may I say how much the MLA appreciates the very public approach that the Township is undertaking to updating this Official Plan. With all that is going on in Muskoka, it is timely to re-examine the vision that will guide the official plan policies.

It is not my intent to speak to specific policies today but to suggest key policy areas of interest to the MLA.

Recently the MLA participated in the District of Muskoka Official Plan process. We made a number of suggestions for their policies related to development and environment that must cascade through to the local official plans. Our comments today mirror those.

The first and most important policy area is Environment. The **environment must be first** - it *leads* in consideration; it *dictates* the right thing to do. Environmental directions must come first in the list of policies that apply – not buried within. The environment is the most important element of the economy in Muskoka. We cannot **balance** environment with economy and social considerations – for it rarely wins.

Many of our comments on the District Official Plan surrounded policies for lake health which now must be brought into the local plans. It is important that the policies for lake health be supported by compliance monitoring and enforcement at the local level. Further, the District policies do not have a hard stop on development when a potential water quality issue is discovered – like blue green algal blooms which are becoming more prevalent. Causation studies are important tools to manage water quality issues and must be supported and development delayed until completed.

Next - there can be *no minimums here*. We need policies that demand the best in how we design and build; that challenge the routine; exceed the building code; that are thoughtful, creative and leading edge. That allow custom solutions to the unique situations in Muskoka but adhere to a set of principles that allow TML to test and demonstrate that the solution preserves the environment.

Let's have policies that require us to *build back better*. This means that we may need to change the way we grandfather existing development. That we need to consider climate change and its effects on where and how we build. It means that every time a project is done – whether a municipal road improvement, an addition or new build - that the existing condition is improved – lets do our best to reduce runoff, restore buffers, reduce energy demand and plan for extreme weather.

We need policies that will prevent stripped shorelines, blasted slopes, and condos or giant hotels on the shoreline – policies must direct development to be the *right scope and scale* for the site and for the lakes. Density must be hidden and associated with the Towns and settlement areas – not randomly distributed around the lakes. Our shorelines should be dominated by bedrock outcrops and trees, **not** development.

We need policies that recognize that there **is a limit to development**. If we want to maintain the character of the lakes – and the MLA does - then there is a capacity to development. There is such a thing as a cottage that is too big, a lot that does not belong in a sensitive environment, a boathouse that does not block the view or intrude on the enjoyment of others.

We also need policies that recognize that with development there is use – if we build a dock there is a very good chance that it will be used for any number of purposes. It is not sufficient to just carefully site it but to also consider the impacts of boating or other activities on the environment the dock is situated in. Therefore, policies need to be in place to address operational considerations. For example, this may mean developing policies for addressing recreational carrying capacity.

I come to Muskoka to see trees, wildlife and stars; for clean water that is swimmable, fishable and drinkable; for the quiet and to experience our quaint small towns. They too need policies to support their cores, their viability. There are thresholds beyond which we will not see loons or herons; where it will be harder to see the night sky or paddle a canoe. With every project we need to leave a portion that is wild.

We may not know we have crossed a threshold until after we've reached it, at which point it is too late since we can not unbuild - so in the absence of perfect knowledge about the risks of climate change and development, we need to proceed with caution and apply the precautionary principle to our decisions. If by our policies and actions we fail to protect the character of our lakes and environment, we will have failed Muskoka for this and future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning. The MLA looks forward to assisting TML in developing the new official plan for this and future generations



Deborah Martin-Downs  
Vice President & Chair of Government and Land Use

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The mission of the Muskoka Lakes Association is to promote the responsible use, enjoyment and conservation of the unique Muskoka environment.