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Seguin Township
5 Humphrey Drive
Seguin ON
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Dear Mayor MacDiarmid and Councillors,

Re: Dark Sky Lighting Policies and By-Law

The Muskoka Lakes Association (MLA) appreciates this opportunity to request Council to incorporate dark sky lighting policies in its official plan review and by-laws. We understand that Councillor Finnson raised this issue with Council at a recent meeting, and we were encouraged to learn that Council agreed to consider it.

The MLA represents more than 2,000 families in Muskoka, extending from Seguin Township in the north to the Town of Gravenhurst in the south, as well as the Town of Bracebridge and Township of Muskoka Lakes. Our association includes residents on the three big lakes and the numerous small lakes within Muskoka.

In our recent survey of MLA members conducted in May 2021 we asked ‘what do you value about Muskoka? and listed a number of items. The night sky and stars were valued by 76% of our members. Yet light pollution from over-lit cottages, boathouses, pathways and docks is increasingly interfering in the enjoyment of the stars and outdoor night environment – or the ‘view from the canoe at night’. Lighting, like sound, knows no boundaries and light trespass is particularly intrusive over the water where there are no trees or structures to reduce it.

The Township has authority to regulate dark sky lighting by virtue of section 129 of the Municipal Act:

- 129** Without limiting sections 9, 10 and 11, a local municipality may,
- (a) prohibit and regulate with respect to noise, vibration, odour, dust and outdoor illumination, including indoor lighting that can be seen outdoors; and
 - (b) prohibit the matters described in clause (a) unless a permit is obtained from the municipality for those matters and may impose conditions for obtaining, continuing to hold and renewing the permit, including requiring the submission of plans. [emphasis added]

The Township's current Official Plan recognizes the importance of dark sky compliant lighting, and provides that the Township will consider developing a dark sky lighting by-law:

F.1.5 The Township recognizes the importance of low-impact or Dark Sky compliant lighting in maintaining the natural night skies of all areas of the Township. The Township will consider the development of a Dark Sky lighting by-law, protocol and information pamphlet to encourage the use of Dark Sky lighting techniques and to educate the community.

However, we understand that the by-law, protocol and information referred to in this section have not yet been developed.

The International Dark Sky Association ("IDA"), a recognized authority on light pollution, advocates for minimizing the harmful effects of light pollution. The IDA advises that outdoor lighting should:

- Only be on when needed
- Only light the area that needs it
- Be no brighter than necessary
- Minimize blue light emissions
- Be fully shielded (pointing downward)

The MLA also refers Council to these two sources of information on dark sky lighting standards and regulations:

- the IDA's Guidance and Best Practices for Dark Sky Planning [here](#) which sets out recommended standards for dark-sky-friendly lighting policies including:
 - shielding outdoor fixtures so that light is not emitted above a 90% angle (p. 10)
 - limiting the amount of light by shining lights down, only lighting the desired areas, using the lowest adequate bulb intensity, and installing timers and motion sensor lights (p. 11)
- 'Turning the Lights Out On Light Pollution' [here](#), a 2014 report written by Nancy Cornish to advise the Township of Stone Mills in eastern Ontario on the content of their dark sky bylaw.

The value of having a dark sky lighting bylaw was demonstrated last fall when a cottage owner on Lake Joseph applied to Township of Muskoka Lakes (TML) for an exemption from TML's lighting bylaw [2014-029](#). The bylaw requires lighting fixtures to be shielded so that light only shines downward. The applicants requested permission to have their lights shine upward on the basis that the lights were under an 11" overhang. Numerous complaints were received from neighbours about the excessive lighting at this property. TML's Planning

Committee declined to exempt the lights from the by-law, and the property owners were required to install shielding on their lights.

The MLA urges Council to take steps to protect the Townships' outdoor night environment and our community's ability to view the stars – the view from the canoe at night - by including dark sky lighting policies in the new official plan and adopting a dark sky lighting by-law. We support the recommendations of the IDA, including that fixtures be required to be shielded, and encourage Council to consider a requirement for outdoor lights to be turned off after 11pm other than for reasons of safety or security.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide you with our comments in our effort to help protect what we all love about Muskoka.

Sincerely,



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c.c. Jason Inwood, Chief Administrative Officer
Deborah Martin-Downs, President, MLA
Katie Edwards, General Manager, MLA