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Seguin Township
5 Humphrey Drive
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Dear Mayor MacDiarmid and Councillors,

**Re: Request for Community Input for
Short-Term Accommodations/Cottage Rentals**

The Muskoka Lakes Association (MLA) represents over 2000 families across Muskoka, including in Seguin Township. In our 2019 membership survey, 72% of respondents believed that “the MLA should become more involved in the issue of short term cottage rentals, such as those operated by Airbnb.”

The MLA recognizes that Seguin’s existing zoning does not permit any rental of residential waterfront cottages, and supports Council’s review of its rules in light of the increasing numbers of short term cottage rentals – both directly by cottagers, and through commercial cottage rental businesses.

It is a reality in Muskoka that cottagers are renting their cottages to generate income. Often this income helps cover cottage maintenance costs, but with the growth of online and cottage rental businesses, cottage rentals are becoming potentially lucrative. Some cottages are being built and operated purely for rental – a trend that can negatively impact the cottaging experience on our lakes.

Renters can be a problem because they often have no vested interest in the community or health of the lake. Problems may include: large groups of renters putting a strain on septic systems; loud music and noise on the waterfront; inexperienced boat drivers; off leash pet issues; garbage disposal issues; and failure to comply with bylaws, including fire bans, fireworks bans, and dark skies rules.

On the other hand, some cottage owners rely on rental income to make their cottages affordable, and rent their cottages responsibly and without negatively impacting neighbours. Cottage rental agencies help cottagers by: finding and screening renters; arranging the rental agreement, security deposit and rental payments; taking care of logistics of meeting renters; and preparing the cottage by cleaning linens etc.

The MLA's Government and Land Use Committee (GLUC) has considered Seguin's proposed approach for regulating short term accommodation/cottage rentals (STA), and our views are as follows:

1. Seguin should amend its zoning bylaws to permit residential cottage owners to rent their cottages, in order to provide rental income to cottagers, and an alternative form of accommodation for tourists. However, the consensus of GLUC members is that this should be subject limitations:
 - a) We support minimum rental periods of 7 consecutive days which should reduce potential conflicts with weekend warrior renters; we also believe this will help support local resorts by steering shorter term tourists to the resort properties.
 - b) We also support there being a maximum rental period of 28 consecutive days, in order to prevent cottages from being built and operated as commercial rental properties, which should only be allowed on commercially zoned properties or those licensed for this purpose; and
 - c) That a cottager be able to rent out their cottage for a maximum of 28 days during each 12 month period, in order to prevent cottages from being built and operated as commercial rental properties, which should only be allowed on commercially zoned properties or those licensed for this purpose.
2. Cottagers should be permitted to pay a fee to a cottage rental business to help rent their cottage, since we believe these rental businesses can provide a valuable service to cottagers (such as the ones noted above).
3. Seguin should provide education and communication to cottagers who rent their properties. This should include information for cottagers to give to their renters describing how to be a good neighbour (eg. the MLA's Good Neighbour Code), and details of Seguin's noise, dark skies, fire, garbage, septic, and other relevant bylaws.

4. Seguin may need to devote additional resources to enhancing its enforcement capability in order to ensure compliance with its new STA zoning bylaws.

5. Seguin should consider adopting a licensing system, funded through licensing fees, where cottage owners must obtain a licence in order to rent their cottages, as other municipalities have done. This will enhance Seguin's ability to regulate STA's by imposing conditions such as maximum occupancy (eg. 2 people per bedroom) and compliance with Seguin's noise and other bylaws. Seguin will be able to revoke a licence, if justified.

We appreciate this opportunity to comment, and look forward to continuing to participate in this review process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deborah Martin-Downs", enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Deborah Martin-Downs
President, Muskoka Lakes Association

cc. Katie Edwards, General Manager, MLA
Susan Eplett, Chair of Government and Land Use Committee