

May 26, 2020

District of Muskoka Office
70 Pine Street
Bracebridge, ON
P1L 1N3

Attention: District Chair, John Klinck

Dear Chair Klinck,

Re: Municipal Modernization Committee

The Muskoka Lakes Association (MLA) and Friends of Muskoka (FOM) commend Muskoka District Council for both its recent creation of a Municipal Modernization Committee (the “Committee”), as well as its leadership in raising the quality of the dialogue as we confront COVID-19 in our community.

With respect to the new Committee, we believe it is a very worthwhile initiative that has the potential to significantly improve many aspects of District voter representation and local government operations. The MLA and FOM, representing in excess of 6,000 voters, have great interest in many of the areas within the purview of the Committee and we will be commenting on a number of them as the Committee’s work progresses. In a perfect world, we would not be submitting this letter as Council wrestles with a COVID crisis, but we are mindful of the December 2020 deadline for the Committee to complete its work.

Today’s correspondence will deal exclusively with a critical issue of concern within the District, that being the historical weighting of the seasonal population at 50% versus the weighting of the permanent population at 100% for the purpose of voter representation on District Council. District Council agreed with this concern when it passed a resolution on June 19, 2017 “That Muskoka District Council agrees in principle with the premise of representation by population which includes 100% weighting for the seasonal population.” We urge District Council to authorize the work required to give effect to this resolution in time for seasonal voters to be weighted at 100% in the 2022 municipal election.

As you are likely aware, the 50% weighting for the seasonal population has been in place since the inception of the District in 1970 and has been a long-standing concern of seasonal residents. We agree with District Council’s 2017 decision to move to a 100% weighting for the following reasons.

1. The original rationale in the late 1960s for weighting the seasonal population at 50% was that seasonal residents were only in Muskoka for a portion of the year. This is no longer the case, since seasonal residents now spend extended periods of time in Muskoka and have become actively involved in the community through both volunteer and elected roles. This was noted in the Final Report on the District of Muskoka Council Composition Review dated October 16, 2017 (the “2017 Review”) which stated “there can be little doubt that some seasonal residents are as deeply invested in their cottage community as they are in their home neighbourhood.”

2. The consultants who conducted the 2017 Review interviewed members of District Council, held a public meeting, and considered the public's verbal and written submissions. They concluded "We believe, as do virtually all participants in this review, that seasonal residents should be weighted at 100 percent for the purposes of determining representation on District Council."
3. Virtually all municipalities across Canada treat residents fairly and equally for the purpose of elected official representation. The current District model in our view is antiquated and out of touch with standard practices. The heart of all true democratic institutions is one person one vote. The District is lagging terribly on this fundamental underpinning of democracy, which was also noted in the consultant's report. As a high-profile outlier, we think District Council should be keen to correct this short coming.
4. Seasonal residents make a significant financial contribution to the District in the form of property taxes and significant year-round support of the local economy. But to be clear, we are not advocating for representation based on financial contribution -- we are simply looking for equal representation of seasonal and permanent residents and no more.

It is our view that implementing District Council's 2017 decision to move to a 100% weighting for seasonal residents can be done in advance of, and independent from, any discussion regarding size of District Council and regional representation.

To help communicate our views, we have taken the liberty of copying other members of the Committee.

We would appreciate hearing back from you on the Committee's and District Council's view on this matter at your earliest convenience. We are quite anxious to have this situation corrected in time for the October 2022 election.

We thank you for considering our views and welcome an opportunity to meet with you to discuss it in person if it would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Muskoka Lakes Association



Lawton Osler, President

Friends of Muskoka



Laurie Thomson, President

Cc: Norm Miller MPP, Scott Aitchison MP, Mayor Phil Harding, Mayor Terry Glover, Mayor Peter Koetsier, Mayor Paul Kelly, Mayor Karin Terziano, Mayor Graydon Smith, Michael Duben District CAO, Amy Back District Clerk