



Welcome to March 2016 NewsBites –

Municipal Budgets - January to March is budget time in Muskoka. The MLA has attended most municipal councils' budget deliberations and is pleased to provide you with each area's final tax levy. Taxes are derived from both commercial and residential properties, with the residential portion being significantly higher in Muskoka than in most communities. Municipalities with large waterfront properties have a tax base founded on high-assessment-value properties. These waterfront properties pay the majority of taxes for local services. For this reason, the MLA feels it important to follow the budget talks and report back to our members on the final results.

MPAC, which determines your property assessment, has completed its assessment of all properties in Ontario as of January 2016. The new assessment will be used as the basis for your municipal taxes for the next 4 years starting in 2017. Assessment notices will start to be sent out in staged releases beginning April 4th. Assessment notices for Muskoka properties will be mailed out **July 11th**. For Muskoka Parry Sound district, residential waterfront properties on the big 3 lakes will show an increase in value of about 10%, residential waterfront properties on the other lakes will show an increase of 6%, residential non-waterfront properties increased by 2.64% and condo residential properties **decreased** in value by 6.6%.

This year most Muskoka municipalities decided to pump up their infrastructure reserves as funding from the provincial and federal governments has been reduced. This will result in higher taxes to you. (You will find the details under each municipality's listing, below.) ***The MLA encourages all municipalities to aggressively pursue any government infrastructure funding when it is announced. The MLA reviewed the budgets of Seguin Township, Gravenhurst, Township of Muskoka Lakes (TML), Bracebridge and the District of Muskoka.***

We submitted detailed comments to TML, Bracebridge and the District. Reviewing these budgets is a major undertaking. The MLA is looking to augment our team that covers municipal budgets. If you are concerned, financially savvy, and able to help the MLA review budgets and argue for more realistic taxation, please contact our office at lisa@mmla.on.ca or 705-765-5723.

The Spring Thaw - With spring fast approaching the MLA reminds our members to keep checking with Environment Canada regarding the spring thaw weather conditions. Residents are reminded to keep a close watch on conditions as increasing water levels are typical this time of year. The Parry Sound/Muskoka Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry is closely monitoring the weather and developing watershed conditions. Their recent bulletin stated "Flooding is not expected but those affected by high water levels in the past are advised to take necessary action to secure any vulnerable property in close proximity to rivers and lakes." For further information and important useful links, see the Parry Sound MNRF District on this page [here](#).

New Dock and Boathouse Permits Required by Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry – As a result of a court decision, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) will begin issuing **Land Use Permits** (LUPs), free of charge, for new, expanded and seasonal placement of docks and single-storey boathouses that occupy more than 15 square metres (shadow). Replacement structures will also require authorization if the structure occupies more than 15 square metres. In cases where construction includes works conducted on privately owned shore lands a work permit will also be required. Two storey boathouses still require a MNRF Land Use Permit and the process and fees associated with this remain the same. The required MNRF Land Use Permit is required to be submitted with the building permit application. For more information please see [here](#).

DISTRICT OF MUSKOKA

2016 Tax Supported Budget Approved - Council voted to approve the 2016 Tax Supported Operating Budget and 2016 Capital Budget and Forecast. The budgeted expenditures include \$114.6 million in operating expenses and \$44.2 million in Operating Revenues for a net levy of \$70.4 million. Muskoka residents will see an estimated 4.07% increase on the District's general municipal property taxes in 2016 (excluding water, sewer and waste management). This represents an increase of \$22.78/household based on an average assessment of \$200,000 for a home in Muskoka. ***The MLA recognizes that 2.58% of the 4.07% increase is due to increased OPP costs. For a summary of how the new OPP costing model has affected the District's levy, and area municipal budgets, please see our Summer issue of Shorelines [here](#).***

District to Transition to Direct Delivery of Ambulance Services - Medavie EMS Ontario has been providing ambulance services for the District for the past 7 years. On September 4th the District will be bringing ambulance services in-house. This change will have no impact on patient care services to the public. In transitioning to direct delivery, Medavie EMS paramedics currently delivering ambulance services in Muskoka will join the District staff team. ***The MLA welcomes changes that result in a savings to the taxpayers while still delivering the same level of service.***

TOWN OF BRACEBRIDGE

Town approves a 4.9% Tax Increase – Budget deliberations have concluded with a resulting tax increase of 4.9%. Capital and capital maintenance costs account for a significant portion of the increase. This tax increase equals an increase of \$38 per year on a \$200,000 home. Capital budget costs, public works winter control maintenance costs and costs related to the launch of a new transit system later this year account for the biggest sections of the budget. One amendment that took place during the budget deliberations was a decision to increase the transfer to capital reserve by about one per cent, the equivalent of about \$120,000. Mayor Graydon Smith said one of council's goals it to be able to fully fund the 10-year capital plan by about 2019 and they are making annual adjustments to put more money into the capital budget to ensure the plan is fully funded. The Mayor noted that the Town is fortunate that this has been a year of assessment growth: "Which is a good sign that the community is growing and we're thriving. We can use that increase in assessment growth to fund some of these new projects." For the local news story please see [here](#). ***The MLA will be meeting with Mayor Graydon Smith as a follow-up to our submitted budget letter.***

Bracebridge continues to advocate for Greater Municipal Involvement in Healthcare Decisions – On February 22nd Bracebridge Mayor Graydon Smith joined over 20 Ontario municipal leaders to discuss the continued reduction in health care services and potential hospital closures in small urban and rural communities throughout Ontario. The recent Ontario Budget does not provide a long-term plan for the smaller and medium-sized hospitals in Ontario. Instead, the hospitals providing vital services for smaller communities are at risk of reduced funding, the need to decrease services, and, in worst case scenarios, facing closure. Bracebridge and Huntsville Hospitals are currently being reviewed to determine if they should continue to serve their communities or instead have both communities serviced by one hospital to be located in Port Sydney. The Honourable Dr. Eric Hoskins, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has been invited to meet and discuss these issues at the Ontario Small Urban Municipalities Conference in May 2016 in Goderich, Ontario. For more information see [here](#). ***The MLA continues to follow this important issue and hopes that the smaller municipalities will be successful in maintaining their respective healthcare facilities.***

Bracebridge Supports 'Earth Hour 2016' – Earth Hour is a worldwide grassroots movement by World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to unite people to take action for the planet. The Town of Bracebridge will once again participate in Earth Hour on **Saturday, March 19th at 8:30 p.m.** Earth Hour is not just about saving an hour's electricity. It's about uniting people to protect the planet. For how you can participate, and to learn how Bracebridge will participate, see [here](#). ***The MLA salutes Bracebridge in its efforts as a role model to educate others on the importance of energy conservation.***

TOWN OF GRAVENHURST

Town approves a 7.7% Increase - For Gravenhurst residents, the town's share of the residential taxpayer's bill will increase on average by \$24.10 per \$100,000 of assessment, or \$46 for the median residential property valued at \$215,000. Five of the 7.7% increase will go towards capital costs totalling about \$625,900. About 60 per cent of that total, \$375,540, will be used to grow capital reserves. Unlike 2014's operating budget deficit of more than half a million dollars, 2015 saw a surplus of about \$350,000. The remaining 2.7% is broken down into 1.7% as the cost of continuing the same level of service and 1% is slated for new initiatives. CAO Glen Davies stated "In conclusion, 7.7% is a large increase. But when you break it down, it is a positive investment in our infrastructure." Local news coverage can be found [here](#) and [here](#). The Town press release is [here](#). ***Once again the Town of Gravenhurst has the highest levy at 7.7% whereas other municipalities' levies are in the range of 4.0 to 4.5%. However, Gravenhurst is working towards getting their budget in-line by putting more money into reserves, which is commendable.***

NEW On-line Official Plan Survey – Gravenhurst wants to hear more of your comments and ideas regarding the new Official Plan for the Town. The survey will remain active to receive your comments until the end of March. Staff has posted the new 10 minute survey [here](#). Public consultation meetings have been delayed until mid to late April.

On March 8th, the MLA held their second meeting with local Gravenhurst small lake associations to review and discuss this on-line survey. The MLA strongly recommends that our members fill out the survey making sure to include any specific comment clarifications at the end of the survey. Your voice in the future of your town counts!

New Committee Members Needed – Gravenhurst Council is seeking new members for the following committees:

Environmental Advisory Committee (2 new members)

Municipal Heritage Committee (2 new members)

Terence Haight Financial Committee (1 new member) and

Communities in Bloom (7 new members)

Members of the public wishing to participate in any of the above Committees are welcome to submit, in writing, an expression of interest including your background and experience to Kayla Thibeault, Clerk, 3-5 Pineridge Gate, Gravenhurst P1P 1Z3, or by email: kayla.thibeault@gravenhurst.ca, by 4:00 p.m. on Thursday March 31, 2016. For more information on each committee, please see:

www.gravenhurst.ca/committees . ***The MLA encourages both year-round and seasonal residents to join these committees. What better way to meet new neighbours, expand your knowledge of your Town and contribute to your community!***

SEGUIN TOWNSHIP

Ward 4 Councillor Doug Sainsbury Passed Away March 2nd, 2016 – After a lengthy battle with cancer Councillor Sainsbury passed away in his sleep at the West Parry Sound Health Centre on March 2nd. Doug served on Seguin Council for 11 years. He also served a Chair on the Airport Commission. ***The MLA extends condolences to Councillor Sainsbury's family and appreciates his many years of devoted public service.***

OMB Hearing regarding Carrying Capacity of Lakes – The Mayor of Seguin has written a letter to all lake associations in Seguin Township to advise them that Council has hired the law firm of Weir Foulds to coordinate the actions and involvement of any and all interested area Lake Associations, as parties to the hearing in order to put forward a clear and comprehensive position. The issue is the use of recreational carrying capacity policies to establish the number of lots allowed on a lake. Seguin Council has refused an Official Plan Amendment and that refusal has been referred to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). The hearing date is scheduled for Wednesday, July 13th, 2016 at Seguin's Township office. ***The MLA intends to attend this OMB hearing as it will be precedent setting for Seguin Township and other municipalities that rely on recreational carrying capacity policies to establish the number of lots on a lake.***

Report from Councillor Jack Hepworth – Councillor Hepworth's newest report can be found [here](#). Highlights include details on the upcoming Muskoka Summit on the Environment May 27th and 28th and the Safe & Quiet Lakes Stakeholders Meeting on April 8th, an update on the funding for the Rosseau Memorial Hall and a detailed summary of the March 7th Seguin Council meeting. Be sure to check out the TV trailer for "Eyewitness" – a 10 episode television series scheduled to be filmed in Seguin for USA Network by NBC/Universal from April 25th to August 8th. ***The MLA thanks Councillor Hepworth for another valuable update.***

By-election held for the Office of Ward 4 Councillor – Susan Adams, Terry Fellner, Ronald Steele and William Stoneman have registered to run for the office of Ward 4 Councillor. The 2016 Municipal By-Election for the Office of Councillor Ward 4 will be held using a combination of Internet and Telephone voting. During the week of April 11, 2016 all persons entered on the Voters' List for Ward 4 will be mailed a voter information letter with a Personal Identification Number (PIN) which will be used to log into the secure voting system (either by computer or telephone) to vote anonymously. Voting may take place 24 hours a day between

10:00 a.m. EST Tuesday, April 19, 2016 and 8:00 p.m. EST Monday, April 25, 2016. **Note: Only electors in Ward 4 will be voting in this By-Election.**

TOWNSHIP OF MUSKOKA LAKES (TML)

TML approves a 4.02% increase - On March 18th, TML Council adopted their 2016 budget with a 4.02% increase in the tax levy, which equals a \$1.80 increase per \$100,000 of residential property assessment. On March 4th, Council had directed staff to go over their respective budget requests to find a savings of at least \$200,000 in total prior to Council passing the 2016 budget. Staff reviewed proposed capital expenditures and removed three capital projects totalling \$76,000; these savings will remain in the TML Parkland Reserve. In total, staff was able to identify \$150,000 in savings. Councillor Phil Harding stated "I don't want to raise the levy to six per cent to build reserves. I want to watch what we are spending and adjust the capital ... we really need to have a long hard look at our 10-year capital plan, and make sure we are delivering the right service at the right level for our taxpayers." See the local story [here](#). ***The MLA delegated at the March 4th public meeting – our letter can be found [here](#). The MLA is pleased TML is concentrating on increasing their reserves and that their debt remains one of the lowest of the area municipalities.***

A 'Win' at the OMB for the MLA – The MLA appealed TML's Zoning By-law Amendment to the OMB regarding proposed construction of an over-sized boathouse on Lake Rosseau to house a collection of 'antique' boats. The application proposed to build over 285 feet of shoreline structures when TML policy's only allows 25% shoreline coverage to a maximum of 75 feet. The OMB's 4-day hearing was scheduled to begin on Tuesday February 23rd. The Board was advised in advance of the hearing that the issue had been resolved as the applicant had decided he no longer wanted to proceed with the application. Following detailed exchanges of planning opinion, Minutes of Settlement were reached in which the applicant agreed to allow the appeal, striking down his application, to proceed. Professional planner for the MLA, Anne McCauley attended the hearing. The Board agreed to repeal the zoning by-law after all parties requested the Board rescind the by-law as per the Minutes of Settlement. The applicant's zoning has now reverted back to residential waterfront zoning. ***The MLA is extremely pleased that the applicant withdrew his application. By opposing this application, the MLA has upheld the regulations that preserve waterfront appearance and character and avoided setting a precedent for others wishing to build boathouses larger than allowed.***

Redstone Tent & Trailer Park Proposal –Redstone Development is proposing to develop a new 75-site tent and trailer park on the former Gull Lake Tent and Trailer Park on Lake Rosseau. Gull Lake Tent and Trailer Park has been closed since approximately 2007. The Township's new Zoning By-law states that no new tent and trailer parks can be established on the big 3 lakes (Rosseau, Joseph and Muskoka). The new property owners (Redstone Development) have appealed the zoning by-law which excludes permission to build their proposed tent and trailer park. The OMB hearing is scheduled for April 18th. The neighbouring property owners have asked the MLA for support in opposing this zoning amendment by helping to inform our members of this issue. **If you, or a neighbour of yours, would like more information please contact: Dean Johnson, representing the local area association, at 705-325-6200 or by email dean@rjins.com** ***The MLA is in agreement with TML that no new tent and trailer parks should be allowed on the 3 large Muskoka lakes (i.e. Rosseau, Joseph and Muskoka). The MLA will be present at the April 18th hearing.***

Mist Opportunities/Touchstone Resort receives a final warning regarding installation of a New Sewage Treatment Facility– TML has been dealing with Touchstone Resort for over 10 years now. In 2005/06 TML received assurance from the developer that the resort would not discharge any sewage in Lake Muskoka. Over the years, their Site Plan Agreement has evolved so that it currently states that a new sewage system must be in place by the construction of the 48th unit, or by December 31st, 2013, whichever came first. Touchstone’s planning agent was before TML Planning Council in February requesting approval for Phase 2 of their development. The agent requested that TML not revoke their site plan agreement as the developer has not fulfilled the obligation of a new sewage system by the December 31st, 2013 deadline. The MOECC has examined the existing lagoons have found them to be unable to service any new units; therefore no new units can be built without a new sewage system being operational. To date, the Ministry of the Environment & Climate Change (MOECC) has not received any permit requests from the developer for a new system. The developer assured council that no occupancy permits will be issued for any of the newly developed units until the new treatment plant is in operation. Council voted unanimously not to revoke Touchstone’s Site Plan Approval but instead amend the Site Plan Approval to require that Phase 2 can only be connected to a new sewage treatment facility. ***The MLA is pleased that council and the MOECC are continuing to require a new septic system in order to keep our lakes clean and clear. Clean water is paramount to swimmers’ safety and to the survival of Muskoka’s tourist industry. The MLA hopes Touchstone moves forward to acquire permits for a new up-to-date septic system, considering it was promised in 2005.***

UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

***‘Safe & Quiet Lakes’ 5th Annual Stakeholders Meeting
Friday, April 8th, 2016 from 9:30 a.m. to Noon
Port Carling Community Centre***

Founded in 2011 by a group of concerned boaters, Safe & Quiet Lakes is committed to continuing a positive dialogue to help make our lakes safe, quiet and sustainable. The April 8th meeting will be an opportunity for stakeholders to hear about their plans for the summer of 2016; including a comprehensive communications program featuring a new celebrity spokesperson.

For more information see: www.safequiet.ca

***Muskoka Watershed Council’s Muskoka Summit on the Environment
“Solutions for a Warming World”
May 27th and May 28th, 2016
Rene Caisse Theatre- Bracebridge, Ontario.***

The MLA is pleased to be a sponsor of this educational event. This year’s summit will focus on Climate Change and a range of solutions for a warming world.

For more information see: <http://muskokasummit.org/2016-summit/>