

Welcome to the September 2017 issue of MLA NewsBites –



Welcome to fall and Muskoka's spectacular cavalcade of colour!

The MLA encourages you to take advantage of the scenery, fall fairs, festivals and local community turkey dinners that Muskoka offers at this time of year.

Please remember that when closing your cottage for the winter to ensure that everything in your boathouse is safely stored off the floor, in case of another flood next spring.

The MLA hopes you will support our annual '**Food Drive**'. As Thanksgiving approaches and you clear out your cottage pantry, please donate what you can to the food drive – for the Manna Food Bank.

Our thanks to all who can help and we wish everyone a very "**Happy Thanksgiving!**"

For donation details and drop-off locations, please see the following [Here](#):

### **DISTRICT OF Muskoka**

**Update on the District's Proposed new Resort Policies and Next Meetings** - On August 29<sup>th</sup>, the District held a public meeting to receive comments on their draft Official Plan. Over 100 people attended the meeting; the main topic being the proposed new resort policies. It was clear that the proposed policy to allow resort commercial developments the flexibility to have up to 50% of their units as residential units was a major concern for those in attendance. MLA attended and delegated at this meeting, again expressing our concern that allowing such flexibility will lead to high-density 'residential' housing projects on the Muskoka waterfront. District staff has reviewed all comments and will be presenting a second draft of the Official Plan to the District Planning and Economic Development Committee on Thursday, October 19<sup>th</sup>, at 9 a.m. in District council chambers. In addition the District has also scheduled a second statutory public meeting to receive feedback on the new Official Plan draft for Thursday, November 23<sup>rd</sup> in District council chambers. ***The MLA has now attended and delegated at both District public meetings held over the summer. We are pleased to have been invited by the District to sit on a planning advisory committee to provide further comment on the Official Plan. The MLA will be in attendance at both the October 19<sup>th</sup> and November 23<sup>rd</sup> meetings and urge all those interested in future resort policies to also attend.***

**October 17<sup>th</sup> District Meeting to address new Lake Health Policies (OPA# 45)** –Over the last year District staff has been involved in reviewing and updating their recreational water quality policies. This task has been done as part of their comprehensive review of the District of Muskoka's Official Plan. The District has now received provincial feedback on the newly proposed Lake Health policies and has revised the Official Plan accordingly. As stated above, the new draft of the Official Plan will be presented to the District Planning and Economic Development committee on Thursday, October 19<sup>th</sup> at 9 a.m. in District council chambers. ***The MLA will be in attendance at the October 19<sup>th</sup> meeting and expects to see representatives from those lake associations who also had grave concerns about the removal of lake classifications and the new direction District is taking regarding lake health.***

**District Council Approves Consultant for Council Composition Review** – In July 17, District Council voted to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for Consulting Services to undertake a Council Composition Review. The RFP closed on September 1<sup>st</sup>. The District received three submissions with only one of the submissions meeting their

budget of \$20,000. The successful applicant was **Andrew Sancton Consulting with a bid of \$19,950**, which includes public consultation. Access the full staff report [Here](#):

**District Council Invites the Public to provide Comment on District Council Composition** – In a recent press release the District is encouraging all residents to come to a public consultation session being held this **Thursday, October 5<sup>th</sup> from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the District's Council Chamber**. The District's consultant will review and make recommendations regarding:

1. How many representatives each local municipality has on District Council.
2. How many votes each representative has.
3. How these issues should be resolved given the unique challenges posed by the District's large seasonal population.

Following the public and stakeholder consultations, a Final Report will be prepared for consideration by District Council on Monday, October 16<sup>th</sup>. See here for the Interim Report containing background research and preliminary analysis [Here](#):

#### **Public Consultation Session Details:**

**Date:** Thursday, October 5, 2017

**Time:** 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

**Location:** District Administration Office in the Council Chamber, 70 Pine Street, Bracebridge, ON P1L 1N3

***Although the MLA supports the District's efforts to receive public input on this important issue, we are disappointed by the short notice of this meeting. This is an extremely important issue which has far-reaching consequences regarding your representation at District Council and future decisions they will be making on your behalf. Please consider attending.***

**District's 'Second Home Survey' Update** – Muskoka's 21,000 seasonal residents were asked to provide feedback about their spending habits, needs and concerns through an online survey called the 'Second Home Study'. Survey results will also influence District policies and the future composition of District Council. The survey closed August 31<sup>st</sup>. Only 3,800 responses were received; which is 2,000 fewer responses than the previous study the District undertook in 2013. District CAO and staff will report to District council on the Survey results in the next few months. ***Both District staff and the MLA are disappointed that so few seasonal residents took the time to contribute to this important study (18%). A prime influencing opportunity was missed by the cottagers.***

#### **TOWN OF BRACEBRIDGE**

**New Location for the Bracebridge Public Library** –At the September 12<sup>th</sup> Council meeting, council voted 4 to 2 in favour of relocating the Bracebridge Public Library to a new site. It was suggested that the library could be located where the new arena and field house are planned for on Salmon Avenue. For the full story please see [Here](#):

#### **TOWN OF GRAVENHURST**

**Opportunity to Address Increased Growth in Gravenhurst** – On Wednesday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, between 9 -10:30 a.m., the public is invited to participate in a session to discuss current projects and initiatives regarding future growth in Gravenhurst. The session will be held at the Residence Inn, Gravenhurst Muskoka Wharf. As per the Town's press release – ***"This is an important opportunity to be an active participant, help guide and foster economic development in our community," said Jeff Loney, manager of economic development. "Without***

**community support, partnerships and guiding pillars, we wouldn't be seeing all the great changes and new developments that are happening here in Gravenhurst."** Full press release is [Here](#):

***The MLA encourages all residents to attend and provide needed input into the growth of your town.***

**In-Town Bus Service will Continue to December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017** –The pilot transit service will run on the same mid-week schedule with a **\$2.00** fare to be implemented, to help offset associated costs. Staff will be advising council on the outcome of the pilot project later this year in anticipation of the 2018 budget. Full press release is [Here](#):

**Gravenhurst's 'Communities in Bloom' Receives National Recognition** - The Town of Gravenhurst received a 5 Leaves / Bronze rating and a special mention for *Gravenhurst Community Improvement Plan* during the 2017 National/International Symposium and Awards Ceremonies in Ottawa-Gatineau, National Capital Region. Gravenhurst participated in the Canada 150 category: a one-time special non-competitive category to provide communities with the opportunity to showcase achievements in greening their community and celebrate Canada's 150th Anniversary. See here for all the details [Here](#): ***The MLA congratulations the Town on this impressive rating! Councillor Sandy Cairns and all the many volunteers who helped beautify the town are to be commended for all their time and effort.***

## **SEGUIN TOWNSHIP**

**Councillor Jack Hepworth's September 18<sup>th</sup> Council Report** – Two issues caught the attention of the MLA in Councillor Hepworth's latest council report:

- 1. Short Term Rentals** - As per the report: "At the September 5th meeting, Council discussed the possible regulation of short-term cottage rentals. Council directed staff to prepare a summary of terms of reference and a proposed time line for researching regulation of short term cottage rentals and reporting to Council." ***The MLA is very aware of the concerns surrounding Airbnb short term rentals and is pleased that Seguin staff is investigating this issue. We look forward to that report.***
- 2. Preliminary Discussions re the 2018 Budget** – Highlights of the discussion included a target maximum 2% tax increase for 2018, continuing to avoid any debt or deficit, maintain the 5-year Capital program as approved in the 2017 Budget, continue to implement the Comprehensive Management Plan and not increase staffing or programs. ***Once again Seguin Township is establishing the basis for a sound conservative budget. The MLA will keep you informed of their progress.***

***The MLA thanks Councillor Hepworth for his detailed reports. His full report can be found [Here](#):***

## **TOWNSHIP OF MUSKOKA LAKES (TML)**

**'Villas of Lake Muskoka' Resort Condominium Agreement with TML** –Adjacent to Touchstone, *the 'Villas' property is zoned resort commercial*. TML's Official Plan requires resort commercial units to be available to the travelling public for the entire year, including the summer months. However, the District of Muskoka recently approved draft condominium approval for the 'Villas' requiring the units to be in the rental pool for a minimum of 10 weeks a year, with only 2 weeks during the summer, and not available to the travelling public for the entire year. We question whether District approval is in violation with TML's Official Plan. Listing a unit in the rental pool does not automatically mean that the unit will be rented out to the travelling public. Having a unit in a rental pool for only 10 weeks a year allows the owner to use the unit as a vacation home, or a private rental, for the remaining 42 weeks. These units then become comparable with residential use rather than resort use.

The definition of a 'resort' states that rental units must be available to the travelling public. TML's Director of Planning recommended that units be in a rental pool for at least 30 days during the summer (i.e. 4 weeks in the summer months). This would allow the units to be available to the travelling public in the most popular rental season. However, the ability to enforce the required number of rental weeks of a unit was identified as a problem for TML. Councillors agreed to defer a decision on the 'Villas' condominium agreement to allow further investigation and discussion. ***The MLA is pleased to see that TML Council is becoming aware of the problems associated with allowing residential use of resort units. We look forward to seeing how TML will resolve the discrepancy between the District's approval and TML's own Official Plan policies.***

**TML's Comments on the District's new Official Plan draft**-Director of Planning David Pink presented a report on District's draft Official Plan at the September 14<sup>th</sup> TML meeting. The two main issues continue to be:

1. **Growth Targets** – District has proposed a goal of 70% of all permanent residential growth to be directed to Port Carling and Bala with the remaining 30% growth to the rest of TML, which includes communities like Torrance and Windermere along with the rural areas. This is a significant change from the current target of 20% to the urban areas and 80% to the rural areas. David did note that these are just targets to be achieved incrementally over the next 20 years. However he did also point out that TML's next OP will take aggressive steps towards growth in TML's urban areas of Bala and Port Carling.
2. **Resorts** – The big change proposed for resorts is the flexibility to allow for 50% of a resort to be residential; as opposed to TML's current official policy which requires a resort to be 100% commercial. The District has suggested that each lower-tier municipality have the flexibility to set their own standards for residential component and that each resort application be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

TML staff had other concerns surrounding resorts. These include how to deal with resort properties that are no longer viable, perhaps more stringent downzoning requirements and questions how the District plans to handle Airbnb cottage rentals. Councillors voted unanimously to recommend that Council submit the Director of Planning's staff report to the District (**see link below**). In addition, councillors suggested that the District remove all numbers relating to the permission of a non-commercial use on resort properties (i.e. the 50/50 split); to be replaced with 'a nominal' amount to be determined by the area municipality. Councillors also supported the removal of the growth target figures in the District's Official Plan. **Director of Planning's staff report can be found [Here](#):**

**The MLA will continue to provide input into these important discussions, as the proposed policies have the potential of allowing significantly more dense waterfront development throughout Muskoka.**

**2018 Budget Schedule and Direction to Staff** – On September 14<sup>th</sup> councillors heard a report from TML Treasurer Shannon Johnson in which Shannon strongly recommended that the 5% increase for Capital Reserves continue to be included in the 2018 Budget. She noted that TML will be in a deficit position by 2019; even with the inclusion of the 5% Capital Reserve funds. She also recommended that all departments need to seek ways to reduce their spending. Councillor Phil Harding suggested that all TML departments present a draft Operating Budget no higher than that of the Consumer Price Index (CPI); but capped at 2%. This suggestion was supported by all councillors. Councillor Sandy Currie reminded everyone of last year's commitment to sell the 'Duke House' /Tourist Information building in Port Carling this fall. Proceeds from the sale will be worked into the Capital Assets equation. The Treasurer's report can be found [Here](#):

## **TML's Tentative Budget Schedule**

- Sept/Oct 2017 – Departmental development of 2018 requirements
- Nov 2017 – Consolidation and Treasurer review
- Dec 2017 – Presentation to Finance Review Committee
- Jan 2018 – Review by Committee of the Whole (Jan. 11<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>)
- Feb 2018 – Council adoption (Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>)

***The MLA understands the need for TML to have a 5% levy increase dedicated to Capital Reserves for future infrastructure costs. We are pleased that all are tasked with finding ways to reduce spending. The MLA will remain involved and vigilant.***

**Update on 'Service Levels & Council Composition Survey'** – TML requested public input regarding which township services they value and wish retained in the 2018 budget. They also wished feedback regarding future council composition. The on-line survey to provide feedback closed on September 29<sup>th</sup>. Even though 17,157 notices were sent to TML property owners reminding them of the survey, TML received only 272 responses. The CAO will be bringing a summary report of the public's comments and suggestions to council within the next two months. ***The MLA is shocked that only 1.6% of all TML property owners supplied feedback.***

**Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare Update** – Board Chair Evelyn Brown and CEO Natalie Bubela made a presentation to TML council in September stating that Bracebridge and Huntsville hospitals have been running a deficit since 2015 (when the province changed its hospital funding model). It is anticipated that the deficit will grow to \$3 million by the end of 2017, in part due to new provincial funding that is more supportive of regional single-site hospitals. Currently both Muskoka hospitals rely heavily on donor funding, but unfortunately donations are not enough to keep Muskoka's two hospitals up-to-date and well-maintained. The Board has acquired enough data to apply for additional funding from the province and is pleased to report the province has approved a \$1 million grant.

CEO Natalie Bubela stated that a new Capital Plan Development Task Force has been established to see which services can be shifted from the hospital to the community. They will also be reviewing whether a new one-site regional hospital model is needed for the future. Currently there are 3 potential future models:

1. **Two Sites (not status quo)** – Maintain two sites with Emergency Departments, recognizing the need to reduce duplication of programs and services.
2. **One Site Inpatient / One Site Outpatient** – Maintain two facilities with emergency care. One site would have a primarily outpatient focus (ambulatory with few or no beds) while the other site would have a primarily inpatient focus (patients requiring overnight stays).
3. **One Hospital (centrally located)** – Provide all programs and services on a single hospital site.

At this point, the status quo of maintaining two hospitals is **not a viable option**; a compromise will be needed. Algonquin Healthcare's website contains the link to an on-line survey for the public to provide input on future hospital care models in Muskoka. **The on-line survey is open until Friday, October 13<sup>th</sup> and paper copies are available within the local community.**

For more information, and the link to the survey, please see [Here](#):

**New Heritage Tax Relief By-law** –On September 15<sup>th</sup>, TML council approved a by-law to provide property tax relief to designated heritage properties. An owner of a heritage property may receive a tax rebate of 40% for residential classification, or 40% for commercial and industrial classifications. The owner of a heritage property must first make application to this program by submitting the heritage tax relief form to the Township to see if their property qualifies. A \$100 enrolment fee must also accompany the application. The by-law can be found [Here](#):

***The MLA applauds TML on this new initiative that strives to help preserve Muskoka’s important historical structures and landmarks.***

**Applicant’s Applications continue to be Denied** - In December 2016, Centre West Management applied to develop a 102 acre parcel of land fronting on Cox Bay, Lake Joseph. The property had only a 72 foot frontage which does not meet the township’s minimum frontage of 100 feet in order to be considered a building lot. Both Committee of Adjustment and Council refused the application. The MLA was one of many that opposed this development. Our letter can be found [Here](#):

On September 13<sup>th</sup> Centre West Management brought a new application to Committee of Adjustment, requesting to sever the 102 acre parcel into 2 lots. One lot would have the 72 feet of waterfront along with 19 acres. Committee unanimously denied the application. The application was then reviewed by council on September 15<sup>th</sup>. Staff received over 20 letters of opposition to this proposal. Of prime concern was the location of the dwelling which could be considered two-tier development on the waterfront (i.e. one cottage built behind another). Once again, council unanimously denied the application. ***The MLA is pleased that TML is upholding their by-laws and refusing applications that do not meet waterfrontage minimums.***

**Port Carling Health Hub Community Engagement Meeting** –A meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 5<sup>th</sup> from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Port Carling Community Centre to receive input from the community on what health services they would like to see offered at the Port Carling Health Hub.

## **UPDATE ON BALA FALLS**

**Swift River Energy Ltd. (SREL) conducts Public Meeting** – On Thursday, September 21<sup>st</sup>, SREL held a “construction meeting” in the Bala Community Centre to address public concerns about the proposed hydro plant and any related safety issues. Although the meeting was scheduled to last two hours, the meeting lasted only an uncomfortable 36 minutes. Swift River’s Frank Belerique stated that blasting would begin next March and would continue for 60 days. Attendees were surprised at the timing as blasting would be occurring during the spring freshet, and flooding could be an issue. It was noted that Mayor Don Furniss and councillors that support the project were not in attendance.

***For a full report on the meeting please see [Here](#):***

***Also see the following 2 letters to the Editor –***

The first letter is from a concerned Bala citizen please see [Here](#):

The second letter is from TML Councillor Sandy Currie please see [Here](#):

***The MLA has never been supportive of the project and respects the efforts of those who have worked responsibly to oppose this project. Due to material new changes in the project’s design, we hope SREL will hold more public meetings to ensure the public is aware of, and has input with respect to, SREL’s construction schedule and design plans.***

**Bala Cranberry Festival**

**October 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

**(Always the weekend after Thanksgiving)**

**Saturday Night's Musical Performances at The Kee to Bala features back-to-back**

**'Green River Revival' and 'Hotel California' tribute bands**

**Full details of the festival can be found [Here](#):**