

Welcome to the March 2017 issue of MLA NewsBites –



***The 2016 Muskoka Population Numbers are now available!*** –

The 2016 census numbers for the District of Muskoka and its area municipalities are now available. The tracked numbers show how the area’s permanent population has changed **over a 5 year period - from 2011 to 2016.** The District of Muskoka’s population, as a whole, increased 4.5% over 5 years (from 58,017 to 60,599)

Permanent Population Change from 2011 to 2016:

Seguin Township – Population **increased 7.9%** (from 3,988 to 4,304)

Huntsville – Population **increased 4%** (from 19,056 to 19,816)

Bracebridge – Population **increased 3.9%** (from 15,414 to 16,010)

Gravenhurst – Population **increased 2.1%** (12,055 to 12,311)

Township of Muskoka Lakes – Population **decreased 1.8%** (6,707 to 6,588)

The full details can be found [here](#).

***Population growth is an important issue in Muskoka. When planners and politicians overestimate future population growth, taxpayers are often left paying for municipal infrastructure that isn’t needed. The MLA is concerned that recent population growth has not matched the levels anticipated in the District of Muskoka’s last official growth report produced by Watson & Associates; see the report [here](#).***

***The worst case is Township of Muskoka Lakes which predicted a 3.5% permanent population increase over 5 years whereas the population decreased by 1.8% according to Canada Census. The MLA is concerned about the large number of approved development applications which have not yet been built. Year after year, municipalities set aside infrastructure money and sewage capacity for subdivisions that are not being built.***

***Best Practices to Prevent Shoreline Erosion*** – Spring has officially arrived! You may be beginning to think of upcoming yard work and renovations. The MLA suggests to everyone who is planning on doing any shoreline projects this year to read the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry’s educational pamphlet on best practices to both attain and retain a healthy, natural shoreline. Maintaining a natural vegetative buffer is the best way to prevent shoreline erosion and ensure your lake water remains healthy. The best practices brochure can be found [here](#). The District of Muskoka also has some excellent information regarding healthy shorelines which can be found [here](#).

**DISTRICT OF Muskoka**

**March 23<sup>rd</sup> Meeting on District’s New Official Plan (OP)** – District staff and their consultant have considered comments from the public, the Province, Area Municipalities and special interest groups and have revised the Preliminary Directions for the new Muskoka Official Plan. This revised document is being presented for discussion at District’s Planning and Economic Development Committee meeting on March 23<sup>rd</sup> beginning at 9:00 a.m. At this meeting, the Committee will be considering the revised Preliminary Directions. If endorsed and subsequently ratified by Council, these directions will form the basis of detailed policy development in the next stage of the project. Although there is no opportunity for the public to comment at this meeting, the public is welcome to attend and observe the dialogue. The agenda for the meeting, including the staff report, revised

policy directions and summary of all comments received to date, can be found [here](#). ***The MLA will be attending this meeting and will be reporting on the results of this meeting in a future issue of NewsBites.***

**District's Lake System Health Monitoring Program – 2016 RESULTS** – The District of Muskoka is involved in water testing; they test 193 sites on a rotational basis across the District of Muskoka. They test for phosphorous, water clarity, dissolved oxygen, water temperature, 47 chemicals and Benthic Macroinvertebrate monitoring. Results from testing help District staff draft District Official Plan policies and develop education and stewardship programs. Few Muskoka lakes are nutrient-rich but the District's goal is to maintain the excellent lake status that currently exists. Individual lake data sheets are available on-line now at [www.muskokawaterweb.ca](http://www.muskokawaterweb.ca) ***The MLA is pleased to be one of the partners in these important Muskoka water testing programs. The MLA sincerely thanks all those who take part every summer in our water testing program. You are making a positive contribution in maintaining the health of Muskoka's environment!***

### **TOWN OF GRAVENHURST**

**Gravenhurst Council Approves 2017 Budget** – On March 7<sup>th</sup> council unanimously approved their 2017 Operating Budget. The **2017 Budget will result in a 5.5% increase to the Town of Gravenhurst tax rate** or \$22 per \$100,000 of assessment on the Town share of the residential property tax bill. The full press release and link to the approved 2017 Budget can be found [here](#). ***The MLA delegated at two public meetings requesting staff review their budgets to see if further savings could be found. Our most recent letter can be found here. The MLA is concerned that continued high rate increases may not be sustainable for Gravenhurst taxpayers. We look forward to sitting down with Town staff during the next year to discuss potential opportunities to reduce the tax burden.***

**Muskoka Regional Centre Redevelopment** – On February 28<sup>th</sup> an Open House was held at the Gravenhurst Opera House to present Maple Leaf Schools/ Knightstone Capital's development plans for a Chinese Educational Institute. The Muskoka Regional Centre is proposed to be developed with student dormitories, academic buildings, parking, athletic buildings/fields and an apartment condominium. The proposal is for a private school to provide education for Grade 9 to 12 in accordance with the Ministry of Education curriculum for up to 1,500 students (750 students for Phase 1). The proponents are planning to attract students from mainland China, students from Canada with a Chinese/Canadian heritage and students who are interested in learning a third language. Plans presented showed 30% of the property will be developed into a public park for the Town. Gravenhurst's CAO Glen Davies moderated the Open House meeting. Following this meeting, a special council meeting was held where the mayor and council heard more from the proponents and unanimously voted to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with them. A more detailed 'Master Plan' will be forthcoming from the proponents. For the details of the MOU, please see the Town's press release found [here](#). ***The MLA attended the Open House and council meeting afterwards and will continue to follow this exciting new project. It's encouraging to hear that the proponents "are committed to providing long-term, reliable and sustainable economic benefits and employment to the Town and District."***

### **SEGUIN TOWNSHIP**

**Councillor Jack Hepworth's March 6<sup>th</sup> Report** – Councillor Hepworth provides an update on the Rosseau Memorial Hall Accessibility project, summarizes the March 6<sup>th</sup> Council meeting and gives details on the \$405,000 FEDNOR grant awarded to Seguin Township. From the report: "Seguin Township, in partnership with the Parry Sound Airport Commission, will use the FedNor investment of \$405,000 to complete infrastructure enhancements at the Parry Sound Area Municipal Airport. Specifically, the funding will be used to **construct a 3,000-square-foot hangar, install new fencing and equipment to enhance security, and upgrade the airport's**

**fuel system to better serve domestic and international flights.”** Councillor Hepworth’s full report can be found here: <http://www.jackhepworth.ca/>

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

**Lakeside Lodge Site Plan Approved** –On March 17<sup>th</sup> Council voted unanimously to approve a new site plan proposal for Lakeside Lodge in Minett. The proposed development consists of 44 detached Housekeeping Units (including one within the boathouse) and accessory facilities including a pool-house, pool, lookout gazebo, boathouse and docks. The proposal was almost identical to Site Plan Agreement approved on October 20, 2014 and again on May 19, 2015. The only significant change was the relocation of three units further away from the neighbour on the northern lot line. Two members of the public spoke of their concern that this development could turn into a residential subdivision unless it was clearly stated in the Site Plan Agreement that there would be **‘continued 100% commercial use of the property’**. Council approved the application with the following 5 conditions -

1. Satisfactory confirmation is received from the MOECC that the existing sewage treatment system has been satisfactorily decommissioned;
2. Ensuring the continued 100% commercial use of the property;
3. On-site management facilities to be staffed and available at all times the resort is occupied;
4. Proposed cumulative dock width be reduced; and
5. Receipt of securities

This approval will expire on March 17, 2018, unless the corresponding Site Plan Agreement has been registered on title of the lands. Site plans can be found [here](#) beginning on page 37. ***The MLA is pleased that Council agreed to the 100% commercial condition. The District of Muskoka is currently revising its Official Plan, and one of the resort policies being debated is the requirement of the 100% commercial-use component. The District is receiving pressure from current resort owners to lower the requirement for the 100% commercial component to allow for more residential use. A preliminary report from the District’s consultant is suggesting that resorts should be allowed a residential component of 50% (the other 50% would still be required to serve ‘the travelling public’). The MLA has a number of concerns with the proposal to permit 50% residential and 50% commercial use on lands without municipal water and sewer services. Historically the District has fiercely protected these properties as commercial to provide more opportunities for local employment and to maintain the higher business tax rate.***

**Short Term Cottage Rentals in TML** – Director of Planning, David Pink presented council with a report outlining the issues and the economic benefits of cottage rentals in Muskoka. Over the last few years the number of complaints from cottage rentals has increased. Complaints of increased noise (both day and night), boat traffic, parking problems, fire and safety concerns, firework displays every night of the week and a general disregard for local by-laws are concerns that councillors are hearing. Mr. Pink convened a meeting with other local area municipal planners to discuss what other areas are doing re Airbnb rentals in Muskoka. No other Muskoka municipality has drafted or enacted Zoning By-law provisions, or a Licensing By-law, to deal with short term cottage rentals. Area planners agreed the optimal approach to the problem would be through a licensing system, although difficulties were identified in administration, monitoring and enforcement. Noise by-laws, Property Standards by-laws, Parking by-laws, etc. could be strengthened and if needed, fines could be increased. Mr. Pink stated that increased tourism is a benefit from the sharing economy. Mr. Pink warned that if the municipality wanted to pursue any regulations, that they should note that a number of TML taxpayers rent out their cottages to afford the taxes. Council has requested the CAO Mr. Steve McDonald prepare a comprehensive report, detailing previous complaints, for the April Council meeting. Based on the report, council may choose to set up a dedicated committee to explore this issue further. David Pink’s staff report can be found [here](#) beginning

on page 63. ***The MLA has not taken a position on this issue but is interested in hearing what our members think. Should rental properties be licensed? TML staff looked at this idea when they reviewed a rooming house by-law and proposed a licensing by-law, however council never adopted the by-law. We encourage you to let us know if you have had a bad experience and what your suggestions are to effectively deal with a 'bad renter'.***

**Appointment of a New By-law Enforcement Officer/Property Standards Officer** - TML has hired Jon Poppel as TML's new By-law Enforcement Officer and Property Standards Officer. According to the CAO, Mr. Poppel has significant experience in by-law enforcement in various municipalities; the latest being Wasaga Beach and Penetang areas. He is a member of the provincial Municipal Law Enforcement Association. He begins work this month and will be working flexible hours. Information on TML's by-law enforcement and complaint forms can be found [here](#). ***The MLA has long requested that TML hire a dedicated By-law Enforcement Officer. We are very pleased to welcome Mr. Poppel and wish him all the best in his new position.***

**Council Denies Approval of a Development that Disregards TML's Zoning By-law** - Council recently refused a Zoning By-law Amendment application that proposed to construct a second dwelling and two one-storey boathouses, with associated docks, on Reef Island in Lake Joseph. Approval would permit-

1. Two dwellings to be located on one lot (where only one dwelling per lot is permitted)
2. A cumulative dock width of 224 feet (where the maximum cumulative dock width of 75 feet is permitted)
3. Two new one-storey docks and boathouses within 100 feet of an Environmental Protection (EP) zone; Type 1 and Type 2 fish habitat are found around the entire shoreline of this island.

TML planning staff received a number of letters opposed to this application; including one from the MLA. Mayor Don Furniss stated "We do have a lot of properties with 2 dwellings on them, but that's past history. I can't approve an 8,000 sq. foot dwelling with an already 4,000 sq. foot dwelling on the property. I'm not in favour of this application. It's another situation of "the cart before the horse". Get the severance done first." Council voted 9 to 1 to deny the application. ***The MLA sent in a letter of opposition and was pleased that council voted to uphold their policies and deny this application. Our letter stated that "Council needs to send a strong message that it will not permit overdevelopment of its waterfront; that the natural environment will be preserved to sustain Muskoka's economy; and that applications requesting over development will be refused." Our letter can be found [here](#).***

**New Pit & Quarry Proposed North of Skeleton Lake (off Aspden Road)** – An application for a new pit & quarry north of Skeleton Lake will require both a zoning by-law and an Official Plan Amendment to identify the area as having aggregate resources. The entire site is 54.8 hectares but only 26.4 hectares will be used for extraction. The remaining 28.4 hectares will be open space. Annual extraction is estimated at a maximum of 200,000 tonnes. High quality granite bedrock has been identified on the site and will be used for asphalt, concrete and crushed rock. Life span of the operation is between 54 to 80 years. There are 3 separate areas of extraction – all having a 30 metre setback from any creeks or wetlands. Council will be working with the applicant to arrange a June date to hold a Public meeting (TML's responsibility) and an Open House (applicant's responsibility) to allow the public an opportunity to view the proposed plans. Details of the proposal can be found [here](#) starting on page 34. ***The MLA will inform you of the date when it has been confirmed.***

**TML Councillor Phil Harding Comments on TML's Approved 2017 Budget** – Councillor Phil Harding has concerns over the recently approved 2017 Budget. According to a local news story Councillor Harding said the budget still doesn't meet the capital forecast. "In the next three years, we are in the hole and out of money," he said. "I am not promoting that we increase the levy additionally; but what I am promoting is that we control spending,

especially on the capital portion on the next 10 years.” TML is considering hosting public meetings this summer to allow the summer and local residents the opportunity to weigh in on what services could be reduced to help lower costs. An on-line survey may also be available to receive public input. Councillor Harding also expressed concern that council did not approve funding for webcasting; something he considers important for the seasonal residents. The full news story can be found [here](#). ***The MLA agrees with Councillor Harding’s concern regarding the 10-year Capital Forecast expenditures. We encourage TML taxpayers to contact their councillors with their comments. We also encourage TML taxpayers to attend any local meetings held by council which discuss possible reduction in services and loss of community facilities. We will inform you of the meeting dates when known.***

### **IMPORTANT HEALTH HUB UPDATE re SUMMER SATURDAY HOURS**

***There has been a large demand for medical care at the health hub which has limited the nurse practitioner’s ability to provide services to cottagers and other seasonal residents. Cottagers are welcome to call for an appointment (705-765-7665) and the receptionist will try to accommodate where possible.***

***The health hub has just received news regarding summer support to assist with the high demand of non-registered and seasonal residents throughout the summer months. Cottage Country Family Health Team is trying to find a part-time nurse practitioner for the summer (ideally a nurse practitioner willing to work part-time and Saturdays).***

***Additional funding for a part-time administrative staff person will be required.***

***Any groups or individuals willing to donate to help support extended services for Friday afternoons & Saturday, please contact Allen or Linda Edwards at [al\\_lindaedwards@vianet.ca](mailto:al_lindaedwards@vianet.ca). Donations will be kept in a separate reserve account and tax receipts will be issued.***

***The full press release can be found [here](#).***