

**Welcome to the November 2016 issue of MLA NewsBites –**

As 2016 winds down, Muskoka District and area municipal councils are beginning to undertake the task of reviewing and drafting their 2017 budgets. Traditionally the MLA, on behalf of our members, has delegated at various council meetings keeping the pressure on local councils to be fiscally responsible with your tax dollars. The MLA will once again be present and engaged at upcoming budget discussions.

**DISTRICT OF MUSKOKA**

**District’s Proposed New Lake System Health Policy** –The District of Muskoka held a public meeting on October 20<sup>th</sup> to receive more input regarding their new proposed recreational water quality model and lake system health policy. The District will continue to test for phosphorous but proposes to rely on ‘best management practices’ for all new development or redevelopment of shoreline properties. Best management practices means all new development and redevelopment of shoreline properties will be subject to site plan control as enacted under the jurisdiction of the local municipality. Site plan control includes requirements for vegetative buffers, storm water management, enhanced setbacks and shoreline naturalization.

Many lake associations and interest groups delegated expressing concern with the proposed changes. Delegates were concerned about the lack of notification of meetings, questioned the scientific basis for change, requested the District take more time to review the proposed changes, and requested the District have more discussions on their individual lakes’ concerns and how these new best management practices will be implemented via site plan controls at the local municipal level. The District will be reviewing all submissions and will be presenting another draft of the policy to the District by early 2017. The District continues to encourage all interested parties/stakeholders to provide comment. Another public meeting may be required in 2017. ***The MLA delegated at the October 20<sup>th</sup> meeting expressing our continued concern regarding those lakes currently identified as over-threshold and those experiencing problems of blue-green algae blooms. The MLA was pleased to note that some of our earlier suggestions have been incorporated into the latest draft. The MLA letter can be found [here](#). Recently District staff invited the MLA, and other concerned stakeholders, to sit down with them to discuss the new water quality model in more depth. The MLA looks forward to this next meeting which will be held November 22<sup>nd</sup>.***

**District Council once again votes down hiring a Facilitator re Councillor Composition** – As outlined in previous issues of NewsBites, District Council has begun discussions on what the appropriate number of District councillors should be. At the September council meeting, councillors voted against hiring a facilitator to help councillors navigate the options surrounding District council composition. At the October 17<sup>th</sup> council meeting, a motion was put forward to again re-open discussion on this issue and re-vote. The motion failed as procedure dictates that 2/3rds of the councillors present must vote in favour of the motion. The motion to reconsider was defeated 12 to 10. ***The MLA will be following this issue with great interest. Future discussions may include not only the appropriate number of District councillors but also how the District Chair is selected.***

**Port Carling Lock User Fees Discussed Again** – Township of Muskoka Lakes Mayor Don Furniss brought forth a motion at the October District Council meeting requesting that the recreational user fees be removed at the Port Carling locks. He cited economic benefits to removing the fees. Township of Muskoka Lakes Councillor Phil Harding disagreed with the removal of fees. The fees collected amount to \$50,000 per year and are put towards the maintenance and upkeep of the locks by the District. Councillor Harding argued “The 10 year cost of maintaining those locks is 3.7 million. The District budgets \$250,000 every year for the maintenance of the locks, which is a \$120,000 shortfall every year. If we remove the \$50,000 revenue, then that shortfall increases to \$170,000 every year.” Mayor Furniss suggested that the \$50,000 could instead be borne by District taxpayers.

The vast majority of councillors felt the user fee was fair and appropriate. The motion to amend the user fee by-law as it pertained to Port Carling lockage fees was defeated. ***The MLA sent a comment to Councillor Harding requesting that user fees remain at the Port Carling locks – “In our opinion, it is appropriate to continue to charge those who use the service (the locks) rather than put the cost onto the general tax levy for all property owners and businesses.”***

**District Corporate & Emergency Services Committee agrees to include the cost of Webcasting in the 2017 Draft Tax Supported Operating Budget** – The issue of webcasting District Council meetings has been discussed in recent years. At the October CES committee meeting committee members voted in favour of including the cost of webcasting in the 2017 budget. Costs would include \$13,768.73 for equipment and installation along with a yearly cost of \$7,125 for the service. Mayors Bob Young (Lake of Bays) and Larry Braid (Georgian Bay) were not in favour of providing the service, whereas Mayors Graydon Smith (Bracebridge) and Scott Aitchison (Huntsville) were in favour. The committee’s budget will be going to District Council for final approval at a later date. The full news story can be found [here](#). ***The MLA supports webcasting of District council meetings as it allows both seasonal and full-time residents to hear discussions around the council table and see how councillors vote on issues.***

## **TOWN OF BRACEBRIDGE**

**Update on Bracebridge’s New Comprehensive Zoning By-law** – Phase 1 of the Zoning By-law, which focused on the urban centre, was completed in May 2016. The Phase 2 review of the by-law, dealing with waterfront properties, began in June. A Public Open House was held in July and a statutory public meeting was held September 27<sup>th</sup>. A revised draft of the Comprehensive Zoning By-law has been prepared which has taken into account the many public and agency comments submitted to the Town. The new draft by-law posted on the Town’s website includes a red-line version of the changes and a chart of the public, agency and Committee comments received. All zoning schedules have been revised and interactive mapping is included. The revised Draft Comprehensive Zoning By-law can be found [here](#).

On November 22, 2016 at 9:00 am a Special Planning and Development Committee meeting will be held in the Town of Bracebridge Council Chambers for Committee to discuss the current Draft Comprehensive Zoning By-law. This meeting is open for the public to attend, however as the statutory public meeting has already been held, there will not be further opportunity for public comment. Any motions made by the Planning and Development Committee on November 22, 2016 will require Council ratification on November 30, 2016 at 7:00 pm. ***The MLA reviewed the new Zoning By-law, as it relates to waterfront properties, and advised the Town that the new Zoning By-law appears to be coming in line with similar waterfront policies in other Muskoka municipalities.***

**Bracebridge honours Veterans with new Signage** – New signage honouring war veterans has been erected on a section of Muskoka Road in Bracebridge. As the local newspaper states “The Veterans Way signage was unveiled on Friday, Nov. 4 in front of a small crowd at the Bracebridge Legion 161, officiated by the town’s director of public works.” The full story can be found [here](#). ***The MLA applauds the Town council for the working with the local Legion branch to make their request a reality.***

## **TOWN OF GRAVENHURST**

**Update on Gravenhurst’s New Official Plan Review** – On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Town will be hosting another statutory public meeting at the Town office to review the most recent draft of the Town’s Official Plan. As of November 7<sup>th</sup> the District of Muskoka, in partnership with the Town of Gravenhurst, updated the Muskoka Web Map site include Gravenhurst Zoning By-law mapping. The mapping was previously only viewable as a static PDF document on the Town of Gravenhurst website. These Muskoka web maps now provide interactive mapping

which makes zoning information easily available to everyone. The zoning map is updated every three months and is available at: [www.gravenhurst.ca/zoning](http://www.gravenhurst.ca/zoning). ***The MLA will be attending the November 22<sup>nd</sup> public open house and encourages all interested stakeholders to attend as well.***

**Council selects Maple Leaf Education Schools as its Partner to acquire Muskoka Regional Centre property** –At the October 25<sup>th</sup> council meeting, council agreed that Maple Leaf Education schools would be the preferred partner to acquire and develop the Muskoka Regional Centre property. Maple Leaf Education Schools is China's largest private international school system offering a high quality international education for students from preschool to high school. Their website states "The Maple Leaf education model provides a western academic orientation and preparation for admission to western universities, blended with the richness of Chinese educational traditions and culture." Maple Leaf Schools is looking to establish a high school/boarding school in Gravenhurst. The Province of Ontario still owns the land but that may change as talks continue with the Town. It is expected that negotiations regarding the approval process and building process will be lengthy. In a November 9<sup>th</sup> news article, Gravenhurst's CAO shares the questions to the public's questions regarding the proposed new development. The story can be found [here](#). An additional story on this issue can be found [here](#). ***The MLA is anxious to see the final plans for this site. We expect the council to do due diligence to ensure the site is sympathetic to the environment and surrounding area, and to ensure that any agreements entered into are fiscally responsible.***

### **SEGUIN TOWNSHIP**

**Councillor Jack Hepworth's November 7<sup>th</sup> Report** –In Councillor Hepworth's latest report he details the process of hiring a consultant to prepare detailed plans regarding bringing the Rosseau Memorial Hall up to today's accessibility standards. Seguin Township has awarded the contract to FAD Architects of Parry Sound. Councillor Hepworth also relates details of the delegation to council from the Rosseau Community Action Committee which provided information to council regarding the needs and priorities of the community as it pertains to the Rosseau Memorial Hall. The public will be consulted before any of the construction plans are finalized.

Of particular interest is Seguin's Financial Report which can be found in Councillor Hepworth's October 7<sup>th</sup> report. See [www.jackhepworth.ca](http://www.jackhepworth.ca). Seguin's Chief Financial Officer reports "The current projected year end surplus is up to \$246,100, up very slightly from \$227,610 previously reported; as programs, such as water quality and septic re-inspection, come to an end, we are beginning to see surpluses in individual departments." ***As expected, Seguin Township continues to manage their finances very well.***

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

**TML Organizational Review**- In December 2015, TML hired Imagine Inc. to review current staffing and the organizational structure at the township office. The consultant's final report was presented this summer to council for their comments. Over the last few months Council has reviewed and discussed this report. At the October Council meeting, TML CAO reviewed a report he'd prepared that compared TML with other Muskoka area municipalities. He stated:

1. TML's permanent workforce is 64 which is low in comparison to other Muskoka municipalities
2. TML lacks a sufficient complement of By-law Enforcement Officers
3. TML's number of planning applications is high in comparison to other Muskoka municipalities.

The CAO stressed the need for council to enact the Phase 1 recommendations of the organizational review which outlined four new staff positions. Money had been set aside in the 2016 Budget for these new hires. Council approved all four positions as outlined below:

1. A Human Resources and Health/Safety Specialist
2. A full time By-law Enforcement Officer
3. A Communications and Economic Development position and
4. A full-time Community Centre Assistant

***The MLA is particularly pleased that Council has agreed to hire a permanent full-time By-law Enforcement Officer. It was noted that the 2016 Budget had set aside funds for this position. We understand that the job descriptions and advertisements are being prepared now.***

***New Comprehensive Zoning By-law 2014-14 is now in effect –All OMB appeals to the new Zoning By-law 2014-14 have been heard and resolved. As a result, the new Zoning By-law 2014-14 is now in effect. **The MLA took a very active role in the discussions regarding 2014-14, which resulted in a number of improvements to the by-law. We are very pleased that the septic system issue was resolved so that no OMB hearing was required.*****

***Cove Marina Dock Expansion 2017 OMB Hearing Date – Following last summer’s decision, regarding both full and temporary use expansion of the docks at Cove Marina, an OMB pre-hearing was held on November 8<sup>th</sup>. It was agreed that a full hearing would be scheduled for April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The neighbours who are opposed to the dock expansion have requested mediation. **The MLA will be following this issue and will report on it as further information becomes available.*****

***Council and Mayor Continue Reprimand of Councillor Ruth Nishikawa – TML council has embarked on an unusual series of activities against Councillor Ruth Nishikawa. This is a complex issue, so we hope readers will forgive us for letting local journalists tell the story.***

This past June (2016), former councillor Ron Brent won a defamation lawsuit against Councillor Nishikawa, over comments she made in 2013. See story [here](#).

Normally, councillors’ legal-defence costs are covered by township insurance. But on September 16<sup>th</sup>, council voted (5-3) that Nishikawa be required to repay the Township’s cost of \$25,000 insurance deductible. (Nishikawa abstained in the vote on the motion.) See story [here](#).

Nishikawa was further reprimanded in October when council voted to remove her from the Township’s Parks and Trails committee, and to prevent her participating as rotating chair at Committee of the Whole meetings for the remainder of her term.

Subsequently, Mayor Don Furniss, acting as a private individual, filed an application asking for a judicial opinion on whether Nishikawa breached the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act by voting on the \$25,000 repayment motion in September (an abstention is effectively a “nay” vote). Furniss said council needed clarity on the issue. Nishikawa accused the mayor of bullying and abuse of power. A hearing has been set for December 12<sup>th</sup> in Bracebridge. See story [here](#).

***The MLA is concerned that personal issues and partisan politics are dominating too much of TML council meetings. We urge all parties to behave professionally and in the best interests of the municipality.***

### ***Christmas Events across Muskoka***

***For a full list of Christmas events, including Santa Claus parade dates, please see:***  
<http://www.muskokalakeschamber.ca/events>