

November 5, 2021

Town of Gravenhurst Council
3-5 Pineridge Gate,
Gravenhurst ON
P1P 1Z3

Dear Mayor Kelly and Councillors,

Re: Proposed Cherokee Lane Development at Muskoka Wharf

The Cherokee Lane development at Gravenhurst's Muskoka Wharf being proposed by Rosseau Development Group raises serious concerns from both a planning, development, and environmental perspective.

The proposed development does not compliment, support or enhance the original objectives of the Muskoka Wharf development.

The Rosseau Development Group's representative stated at the July 21st public presentation that the new development at Cherokee Lane:

"wants to "pick up the baton" and carry on what began more than a decade ago at the south end of the Muskoka Lakes." (partner Scott Moffat).

Rosseau Development have promoted their new plans as being in keeping with the original vision developed almost 20 years ago and have included the original master plans and illustrations prepared by Forrec Ltd as part of their presentation. However, Forrec Ltd has confirmed that they are not working on this development, nor have they been contacted by the developers or seen the proposed development. Forrec's past president, Gord Dorrett, explains:

" The original plan first and foremost understood that the key most important asset of Muskoka Wharf is the Steamships. They are key symbols of Muskoka heritage and the strength of their importance as a tourist attraction make them the major anchor for the development. As such nothing should detract from their vision or operational model.

The principle for the layout of the plan was to utilize the proven retail 'dumbbell' model of retail with strong anchors at two ends linked by commercial properties to maximize traffic for all properties. The Steamships were one natural anchor and the original Museum of Speed and Grace became the second anchor with commercial infill along the way.

The master plan also confined all building developments to land that had been urbanised over the past 100 years (light industry, boat building, tanneries, sawmills and commercialization) and protected and retained the only two natural shorelines; the re-naturalized registered fish habitat zone with the boardwalk and the classic Muskoka granite face shoreline behind the Steamships. As one can see in the original plans and sketches by Forrec, the Cherokee Lane site is clearly shown as undeveloped green space.

As principal in charge for the original Muskoka Wharf project I can clearly state that the proposed Cherokee Lane Development does not fit in with the original vision and in fact is the direct opposite of what the original plan was trying to achieve from an environmental, financial and operational model. In no way does the proposed development at Cherokee Lane build on or contribute to the original vision of Muskoka Wharf.”

The proposed development does not comply with the recent Muskoka Wharf Revitalisation Plan.

Although the original development has not lived up to its potential, the fundamentals of the original design and layout are still sound. As such, the Town of Gravenhurst has realised that the original development still has tremendous opportunity and recently completed the “Muskoka Wharf Revitalization Plan” to look at ways to realise the potential of what was already started. This extensive study was conducted with input from government, independent consultants, local business, tourist operators, stakeholders and public consultation and came up with key objectives that would enhance Muskoka Wharf.

The following key recommendations in the Muskoka Wharf Revitalization Plan are in direct contrast to the proposed Cherokee Lane development:

- “Increase density by infilling of undeveloped lands and vacant properties”
 - Where the Cherokee Lane development is proposing developing new areas.
- “Strengthen the natural beauty of the land”
 - Where the Cherokee Lane development is developed on the last natural shoreline in the bay.
- “Develop plans to mitigate seasonal flooding”
 - Where the Cherokee Lane development would further urbanize the natural waterfront.
- “Improve landscape at Lions Lookout Park to enhance views of Muskoka Bay”
 - Where the Cherokee Lane Development would include a 7 story building in front of the Lions Lookout Park and vistas to and from the water in Muskoka Bay.
- “Develop new condo on already approved site at west end of site.”
 - Where the Cherokee Lane development is a completely new unapproved site.

While Rosseau Development suggested at the July Public presentation that their proposal “is in keeping with the town’s revitalization plans”:

- Not once in the town’s revitalization document was there any reference to, or mention of developing the Cherokee Lane properties as a means to enhance or revitalize Muskoka Wharf.
- The proposed plan actually contradicts the approved Muskoka Wharf Revitalization Plan’s economic, environmental, landscape and masterplan principles on multiple fronts.

The recently approved Muskoka Wharf Revitalization Plan sets a direction for the upgrade and further development of this site based on excellent economic, environmental and planning reasoning. However, we have serious concerns with the proposed Cherokee Lane development for the following reasons:

1. The original plans provided there should be no built development of any lands past the Steamship operations.
 - a. This land is the only natural shoreline left in the bay and should be retained for environmental and visual enhancement of the Bay.
 - b. This natural property is the perfect Muskoka postcard background for the Steamships operations, a key symbol of Muskoka, not a 7 story condominium that would tower over the Steamships.
 - c. Any built development past the Steamships will create major traffic on the water. All public marinas and docking in the original plan were purposely separated from the Steamship operations for this very reason.
 - d. Adding private slips and/or public docking on the far side of the Steamships as proposed by the Cherokee Lane Development creates a serious hazard for Steamships trying to navigate in and out of port, versus small public watercraft. In addition, this will also create more water traffic confusion for arriving and departing small watercraft that are either new to the area and/or boat renters.

There are already serious problems with boat traffic in the bay, adding additional private and public slips, especially on the far side of the Steamships will make it worse than the already problematic situation as brought up by Councillor Penny Varney at a recent meeting:

“I think that Gravenhurst has got to take control of the Muskoka Bay in some way ... There have been nine incidents that the police have called about, boating accidents, already.”

Gravenhurst Banner June 28, 2021

2. The building of substantial new commercial space, that is not part of the original commercial spine between the two established anchors, will not reinforce the overall existing plan with the infill it needs, but rather water it down even further.

There are already several vacant units and 6 undeveloped properties in the original plan, and the financial viability of adding more commercial units is questionable -- especially spread out even further.

3. Rosseau Developments stated at the July public presentation that parking will be underground. According to Mr. Dorrett who knows this site through past work on Muskoka Wharf: "Quite frankly this is simply not feasible. The land in the Bay is a combination of 100 years of bad infill from old sawmills, tanneries, boat building and various light commercial industry, or it is bedrock." The site is also extremely low lying and susceptible to seasonal flooding (note: a recommendation of the Muskoka Wharf Revitalization Plan includes " plans to mitigate seasonal flooding"). Due to these conditions, no properties (condo, hotel or commercial) in Muskoka Bay have underground parking. Even at 1.0 space per condo, the development would require roughly 100 parking spaces. We question where would this be accommodated? And how would it not be visible form the waterfront? In our view, the existing condo site, located with all the shared parking at the other end of the site, is the more appropriate location for condo development in Muskoka Bay.

In conclusion, the proposed Cherokee Lane Development:

1. **Does not compliment, support or enhance the original objectives of the Muskoka Wharf development.**
2. **Does not comply with the recent Muskoka Wharf Revitalisation Plan.**
3. **Detracts from, not enhances, the most significant symbol and major attraction of Muskoka, the historical Steamship operations.**
4. **Urbanizes or obliterates the last natural shoreline in the bay.**
5. **Creates additional boat traffic in an already dangerous bay.**
6. **Does not have realistic plans for parking, or viability of commercial units.**
7. **Does not enhance or protect the natural environment or character of Muskoka .**

We appreciate the opportunity to provide you with our comments.

Sincerely,



Susan Eplett
*Chair, Government and Land Use Committee
and Vice-President*

cc: Melissa Halford, Director of Community Growth & Development