



Minett Joint Policy Review Steering Committee

Report #4 to Township of Muskoka Lakes and District of Muskoka Councils

October 16, 2019

Context/Background:

Minett is located along the western shoreline of Lake Rosseau (on Wallace Bay) to the north of Port Carling, approximately 15 minutes by road. The topography of much of Minett is typical of much of Muskoka with undulating terrain containing forested areas and some wetlands. There is, however, an unusually large area of level land in the area around the site of the Cleveland's Resort.

Minett is well-established resort community, dating back to the 1860's. Much of the resort character is still evident as a result of the resorts that continue to operate in the area today. In terms of existing land uses, Minett currently has a general store, a contractor's yard, some speciality businesses and a post office located at the junction of Muskoka Roads 7 and 28. Wallace Marine is located on Wallace Bay and there are three larger resorts: 1) Cleveland's House, 2) The Rosseau Resort (JW Marriott) and 3) Legacy Cottages (formerly known as Lakeside Lodge) all clustered around the bay. There is also a mix of permanent (15) and seasonal (8) dwellings currently located within Minett.

In June, 2018, reports were presented to the Councils of both the Township of Muskoka Lakes and the District of Muskoka regarding a budget, timeline, coordination and overall process for a concurrent review of the policies that apply to the Resort Village of Minett in both the Muskoka and Township of Muskoka Lakes Official Plans. Following approval by both Councils staff began the process of establishing a 'skills based' Steering Committee comprised of a diverse set of individuals who were to reflect the diversity of Muskoka, and are able to bring a broad and varied set of planning, business and community skills, expertise and experiences to the making of policy recommendations regarding the future of Minett.

Staff developed a detailed Terms of Reference and Guidelines (including supporting appendices) to clearly set out the mandate, roles, selection process, and responsibilities of the Steering Committee. In addition, a project manager was retained to assist the Councils in selecting and then supporting the membership of the Steering Committee.

Committee Activity Update:



We are cognisant of the time pressures that the impending expiry (May 2020) of the Interim Control By-law and the TML Official Plan Review process places on decision-makers in TML. The entire Committee are seized of the importance of getting Official Plan appropriate policy recommendations into the hands of decision-makers and staff in both TML and DMM by the end of the calendar year, or in very early 2020.

In part, the point of this report is to clearly demonstrate to TML and DMM Councils that the Committee is on track to deliver the sort of sound, reasonable, helpful, and evidence based policy recommendations that the two Councils asked the Committee to provide. I am completely confident that by the end of the calendar year, or in early 2020, this Committee will have finalized its policy recommendations and brought them to the attention of TML and DMM Council for review.

In my last report (May 2019) to both the Township of Muskoka Lakes (TML) and District of Muskoka (DMM) I asked for, and received, your approval to commission research in the areas of:

1. Understanding the Waterfront Economy of Muskoka
2. Updating a Boating Impact Assessment for Wallace Bay
3. Updating the District's Environmental Impact Guidelines

The Committee got all three RFPs out to the consulting community in less than a month of receiving your approval and we had two of the three proposed studies underway quickly, with data for the boat impact study being collected over the August 1st, long weekend.

Work on the two studies continues and the Committee will be receiving reports from both consultants later this month. In the case of the Boat Impact Study the report will be the final report, while the report on the Waterfront Economy will be an interim report.

Unfortunately, the Committee received no responses to the RFP regarding the updating of DMM's Environmental Impact Guidelines. We are now pursuing alternative approaches to getting that work completed over the coming months.

Over the summer I believe the Committee has made significant progress toward developing a number of sound, reasonable, helpful, evidence based policy recommendations that will help guide elected officials at both the Township and the District as they make decisions about the future of Minett and perhaps all of Muskoka.

By early July the Committee had developed a 'long list' of nearly 150 discrete policy recommendations. During August the Committee, through spirited and engaged discussion, was able to pare that number back to, a much more manageable, 25 or so..



The month of September brought with it an increase in the tempo of Committee meetings as we initiated scheduled telephone conference calls in addition to our face to face meetings. Earlier this month (October), we met with the new owner of the Minett lands, Mr. Goldhar and his staff. We had a productive and mutually beneficial discussion and exchange of views about the future of Minett.

By and large the interim policy recommendations that the Committee is sharing with you in this Update Report to the Councils have been developed via a consensus of all Committee members. Getting to the point where the Committee has as much consensus as it does has not been easy on anyone. While the debates and discussions were principled and courteous at all times, they have also been long, detailed and hard fought. Every single Committee Member can be proud of what the group has done together to date.

Member Resignations and Committee Effectiveness:

You will recall that TML and DMM initially appointed 12 members and a Committee Chair. During the tenure of the Committee two of those appointees have stepped forward and resigned from the Committee for business or family related reasons. There can be no denying that losing the voices and perspectives of the two members who have resigned has been an unfortunate turn of events. The Committee is aware of the degree of care and thought that went into the design of the Committee and the initial naming of the members. It is largely for those reasons that, after some discussion, the Committee itself has concluded to unanimously recommend that no new members be appointed to the Committee by TML and DMM Councils. The amount of 'catch up' that would be required is simply too significant given the time left before the Committee plans to deliver its policy recommendations to TML and DMM. Further, the Committee believes that the balance that was originally sought has largely been maintained despite the resignations of the two members.

Budget Update:

In June 2018 the Councils of the Township of Muskoka Lakes and the District of Muskoka approved the expenditure of funds from their 2018 Tax Supported Capital Budget and Forecast to cover the costs of establishing and supporting the Steering Committee to the end of 2018. Additionally both Councils agreed to share the costs associated with the Steering Committee on a 50/50 cost shared basis. Both Councils allocated additional resources to support the Steering Committee (again on a 50/50 cost shared basis) through their 2019 budget process.

The table below summarizes the expenditures to date related to the activities of the Minett Steering Committee and demonstrates that the Committee has sufficient funding available to complete the work it has been assigned to do.

2018 / 2019			
Approved	Expenditures	Commitments To	Budget



Budget	To Date (Sept, 2019)	Date (studies in process) (Sept, 2019)	Remaining (Sept, 2019)
335,000	79,940	112,069	142,991

Initial Proposed Policy Recommendations:

It is imperative that it be clearly understood that the work of the Committee is not complete at this stage. While it would be imprudent for either of the Councils (or anyone else for that matter) to draw final conclusions based on this interim update report it is fair to see this report and the initial Proposed Policy Directions as 'indicative' of what the Committee has been focused on and concerned about.

While the Committee is keen to share the state of its current thinking with both the TML and DMM Councils, the Committee is equally anxious that the Councils understand that the Committee will change its proposed policy recommendations when, and if, the studies that the Committee currently has underway (Boat Impact Study and Muskoka Waterfront Economy Study) bring new information, facts or insights to the attention of the Committee. After all, both Council's made it abundantly clear that the Committee was expected to bring forward policy recommendations that were, to the degree possible, evidence based, and it is not until well into December or early January 2020 that the firm responsible for undertaking the Waterfront Economy Study will be issuing its final report.

A complete enumeration of the Committee's current thinking with regard to its Proposed Policy Recommendations for Official Plans is available in 'Schedule A' attached to this report. However, the Committee's recommendations can be effectively summarized as having a scope and tone that focuses on the Committee's intent that any development in Minett must respect the environment first, protecting the shoreline attributes and restoring them where possible. Development at the expense of the environment is not acceptable going forward. This means that development must be done differently than in the past. Any new development must have a light footprint and be designed to incorporate climate change mitigation or adaptation. Development must also work with Minett's topography, vegetation and within the capacity of the environment to absorb the potential uses and water demands. Economics, boating, sewage, and road capacity are still issues to be assessed and inform the policies.

While the Committee still has work to do in refining all of the Recommendations it will make to the TML and DMM Councils, there is one early recommendation that the Committee believes should be brought to the attention of TML's Council immediately. The



Committee recommends that TML Council initiate a process to repeal By-law 2008-129, which permits a 582 foot dock and number of slips in Wallace Bay.

The Boat Impact Study that the Committee commissioned conclusively demonstrated that there has been a significant increase in the boat traffic on Wallace Bay since a similar study was completed approximately 12 years ago. The Committee's boat study also documented a significant increase in the number of instances when the boat traffic on Wallace Bay exceeded the safe boating capacity of the Bay. Allowing the construction of a 582 foot dock and a large number of new boat slips in Wallace Bay will have the unavoidable effect of significantly increasing boat traffic on the Bay and exacerbating the number of unsafe boating instances experienced during the summer months. It is for this reason the Committee recommends that TML Council begin the process of repealing By-law 2008-129 as soon as possible.

Post January 2020

In May 2019 the mandate of the Committee was extended to May 2020 to coincide with the lifting of the Interim Control By-law in TML. The Committee appreciated your willingness to grant the extension.

One of the wonderful things about having a Committee such as this assembled is that it has a great deal of intellectual curiosity and horse power built into its very DNA. In moving from nearly 150 policy directions to about 25 a lot of very good insights were left on the cutting room floor, to use an old motion picture industry phrase.

In debating its proposed policy recommendations this Committee has discussed a wide cross section of planning and development issues and identified quite a number of ways to improve site plans and site specific by-laws in TML and DMM. Given all the Committee has learned to date, and the fact that the Mandate has been extended to May 2020, the Committee proposes to utilize its time between January and May 2020 to focus on proposing recommendations for amendments to some by-laws and planning practices that should be considered by the Councils to ensure that future practice is aligned with the recommendations of the Committee.

Communications

The Committee believes that continued engagement of the public and key stakeholders will be an important and necessary determiner of success regarding the Committee's recommendations. As a Committee we understand and concur that it is the Councils themselves that have the responsibility for publicly communicating about the Committee's recommendations regarding Minnett.



The Committee strongly believes that it can play a positive and impactful role in assisting the Councils to communicate about the substance and importance of the recommendations of the Committee. The Committee members stand ready, willing and able to assist in any way that the Councils find appropriate. In fact the Committee encourages the Councils to call upon the committee members to play an active role in informing Muskokans about the Committee's recommendations.

On behalf of the members of the Minett Joint Policy Steering Committee I formally request that both the Township of Muskoka Lakes Council and the Muskoka's Community and Planning Services Committee receive and review these interim policy recommendations as evidence of the progress being made by the Committee (see Schedule A).

Finally, both Councils should be aware of how much the Committee has appreciated the calm professional advice and assistance of Ms Summer Valentine, Mr. David Pink and Mr. Scot Weeres. While the Committee understands that they were assigned to be 'resources to the Committee', it is hard to overstate the incredibly important role they have played in helping the Committee move forward. We could not have progressed as far as we have without them, and the Committee looks forward to having them be part of the process over the next several crucial months of work.

James Lewis
Chair,
Minett Joint Policy Review Steering Committee