

Planning and Development Committee Report for 2011

Co-chairs: Barry Morrison and Brian Simpson

Committee Members: Peter Cory and Marnie Wraith

Our Muskoka landscape reflects the dynamic interaction between nature and the cultural forces we impose on it. Without Land Use Planning, uncontrolled changes can cause a loss of diversity, coherence, and identity. We rely on good planning as an important part of social policy, ensuring that land is used efficiently for the benefit of the wider economy and population, as well as to protect the environment.

The Ontario Planning Act requires all decisions affecting land use planning matters to be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement which relies on land use planning to promote strong communities, a clean and healthy environment, and a strong economy. In turn, Ontario's municipalities are required to have Official Plans where Land Use Planning becomes a means of managing our land and resources. An Official Plan helps each community set goals about how it will grow, develop, and work out ways of reaching those goals. It also balances the interests of individual property owners with the wider interests and objectives of the whole community. The Ontario Planning Act requires that municipalities review their Official Plans every five years to ensure that the policies remain current and relevant to the local, regional, and provincial circumstances.

Consequently, the District of Muskoka is undertaking a comprehensive review of its Official Plan. They have updated profiles of Muskoka's communities, Muskoka's economy, prepared economic growth strategies, and examined the changing trends in the tourist industry. In 2011, the review will focus on Muskoka's environment; our four primary and 17 secondary watersheds, the wetlands found here and their influence on water quality, flood and erosion control, habitat, and recreational opportunities.

The Township of Lake of Bays has also been reviewing its Official Planning policies. The comprehensive Zoning By-Law, and the Development Permit By-Law have both undergone changes which are posted on our website. Lake health protection, boathouse size restrictions, and maximum lot coverage by built structures are just some of the latest changes made to our township's Official Plan.

As waterfront property owners, we need to become more actively involved in our local Community Planning committees as they have influence on township planning decisions. The growth of subdivisions, the provision of public utilities and services, and property taxes are part of community planning and you have a voice to influence them through your membership in the Lake of Bays Association.

A cautionary note to those cottage owners who build small additions to their cottage, extend a deck, build a garage, install a floating dock, remove trees from the waterfront, or expand the beach area without seeking a development permit. Complaints against such unapproved changes are being reported (anonymity is guaranteed) to the township resulting in owners having to appear before the Planning Committee to explain themselves, apply for the necessary permit, and meet the requirements of the Development Permit By-Law. A building inspection will determine whether the changes meet the building code and then a building permit will be required. Even if you think you won't be caught or reported, there may be a day when selling your property or making changes in ownership (inheritance) will expose the illegal additions as being non-compliant with the zoning. This will cause the transaction to be stalled until the 'changes' have been approved or removed from the site.

As of 2011, the Lake of Bays Township requires every person applying for a Development Permit to meet with the Planning staff for a "Pre-Consultation" review of the responsibilities and requirements associated with being granted a 'permission' for development. This is a pro-active policy change to improve the efficiency for client services.