



14 May 2019

Mr. Ken Seiling and Mr. Michael Fenn  
Regional Governance Advisors

Re: Regional Governance Review

The Lake of Bays Association represents almost 1200 permanent and seasonal families living on and around Lake of Bays. Our mission for more than 90 years has been to promote, sustain and enhance a clean and healthy natural environment, a well serviced community and a safe and peaceful Lake of Bays. The Township of Lake of Bays is 678 square kilometres; situated northeast of Bracebridge and southeast of Huntsville. Algonquin Park is to the northeast and the lakes of the park feed into the Muskoka watershed. There are four hamlets in the Township—Baysville, Dwight, Dorset and the much smaller Hillside. The permanent population is 3,200 residents according to the 2016 census and 11,700 seasonal residents or 79%, according to District estimates.

We are different from southern regional municipalities. The Lake of Bays, which is over 70 square kilometres, and has 210 kilometres of shoreline, sits in the middle of the Township making it challenging to get around. Most people have a 30 to 45-minute drive to get to the major centres of Bracebridge or Huntsville where services like health care, emergency services, social services and schooling are available. We rely on a volunteer fire department, but other first responder services have to travel from Huntsville or Bracebridge leading to very long response times. This geography makes the Township of Lake of Bays unique from the rest of the District of Muskoka; and in fact, the geography of the District as a whole makes it unique from the other municipalities being considered in this regional government review. Our Township mayor and councillors are aware of these unique challenges and work to support the needs of residents creatively and economically. Two examples are arranging to have an ambulance in Dwight on a part time basis in the summer months to reduce response time; and our shared-service fire department with Huntsville. Again, we are not the same as southern regional municipalities.

We do support the continuation of a two-tier government in the District of Muskoka. The District should continue to make decisions on items that have a common impact on or are shared among lower tier municipalities in order to achieve lower costs through economies of scale like solid waste management, water and sewage treatment, District roads and infrastructure, and social services. Currently the District and Township work collaboratively on Economic Development and Emergency planning, which is an effective approach. We feel that both District and local council manage our tax dollars effectively and efficiently. There will always be discrepancies in services and how they are delivered, however overall, we feel we are best served by the two-tier system. Any decisions to change municipal governance must consider the impact on taxes. A May 2015 Fraser Institute study found no tangible, financial benefit from amalgamation and in most cases found per-household municipal tax burdens increased. (*Municipal Amalgamation in Ontario*, Lydia Miljan and Zachary Spicer, May 2015.)

Although we support a two-tier system, we do suggest two key changes at the District level. It would be more equitable for costs to be allocated among lower-tier municipalities based on actual services delivered; for example, OPP costs are currently allocated by the District using an assessed property value formula rather than services delivered.

We also recommend a key change in representation at District Council. Historically, when the District was created, the number of elected District representatives was based on a formula that saw the seasonal resident population given half the weight of the permanent population. Provincial legislation determined the representation at District Council. Today seasonal residents in the District of Muskoka make up about 60% of the total population and pay the same tax rates as the municipality's permanent residents. Representation at the District Council should be balanced and equitable, based on counting both seasonal and permanent residents equally.

The economy in the Townships of Lake of Bays, Georgian Bay and Muskoka Lakes are dependent on the environment and seasonal activity. It is imperative that we continue to have control over land-use planning and development, and other decisions that affect our local communities. In 2004, Lake of Bays Township became the first municipality in Ontario to regulate waterfront development with its Development Permit System by-law. This by-law gives consideration to shoreline habitat, environment, prevention of erosion and maintenance of shoreline character and appearance. The Lake of Bays Association had representation and input over the four years it took to develop the regulations and we are extremely proud of this Development Permit System. It has served Lake of Bays and all the lakes within the Township very well by ensuring responsible and environmentally friendly development on the waterfront. It is now used as a model by other municipalities for their Development Permit Systems and it is our understanding it is currently being used as a model for the proposed Community Permit Planning System (CPPS). Regardless of what form government takes in the District of Muskoka it is vitally important that the Development Permit System by-law be maintained in the Township of Lake of Bays.

In Muskoka the environment is the economy. The protection guidelines offered by the Muskoka Watershed Council are invaluable to the area. As the current flooding in the District demonstrates, watershed-wide planning is essential. In the absence of a Muskoka Conservation Authority, we feel the Muskoka Watershed Council, whose stated goal is *to sustain and enhance the air, water and terrestrial ecosystems of the watersheds of Muskoka for the environmental, health, economic, spiritual and intrinsic values they provide*, is vital to retain for environmental protection in Muskoka. The Muskoka Watershed Council has the knowledge, research and experience to continue to offer independent guidance and recommendations on watershed management at the District level.

In conclusion we believe as an Association that:

1. The District of Muskoka is unique and best governed by two tiers.
2. That District services costs like OPP should be allocated on a usage basis.
3. That seasonal and permanent residents should be counted equally to make District council balanced and equitable.
4. That the Development Permit System by-law in the Township of Lake of Bays must be maintained.
5. And that environmental protection guidelines provided by the Muskoka Watershed Council are the key to ensure responsible economic development.

Respectfully submitted,



Mary Ann Peden  
President