



*Muskoka*

WATERSHED COUNCIL

# Submission to the District Municipality of Muskoka Visioning Program

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Muskoka Watershed Council

8/23/2010

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Comments on Muskoka Vision Project

*(The Muskoka Watershed Council submission to the District Municipality of Muskoka Visioning Program is based on a series of position papers that have been developed and approved by the full Council).*

The mission of the Muskoka Watershed Council (MWC) is to Champion Watershed Health. This is accomplished through evaluation, advocacy, communication and education. Over the last nine years the Council has developed a series of position papers that address significant watershed issues. As the District Municipality of Muskoka considers its vision statement and reviews its Official Plan MWC submits these well thought out positions for consideration.

The development in Muskoka must occur in a framework that recognizes the fundamental importance of maintaining healthy and functioning ecosystems. Healthy ecosystems clean our water and air, form the basis of our recreational and tourism economy, and refresh people in our hectic world. In order to achieve sound planning the framework must:

1. Maintain large and connected natural areas,
2. Retain shorelines in a natural state,
3. Protect wetlands,
4. Contain urban sprawl, and ultimately
5. Reduce our carbon footprint.

### **Economic and Social Base of Muskoka**

As the Ontario economy evolves from manufacturing to knowledge-based, Muskoka has the potential to grow existing enterprises and to explore new opportunities.

- a. Tourism – There will continue to be opportunities to develop events and activities that showcase our natural environment and create jobs, as more people retire and are looking for an active lifestyle. Muskoka tourism is already developing many new products and strategies. The District vision and subsequent Official Plan policy should support the evolving tourism sector.
- b. Forestry – Although the large-scale traditional forestry and logging industry is under pressure with plant and field operations closing or scaling back, the industry itself is looking to refocus its efforts and encourage more value-added industries to develop. There are good hard and soft wood forests in Muskoka and many skilled trades people to support a wide range of small-scale wood manufacturing operations. Policy that supports small business would encourage this type of growth.

Forests are an integral component of the Muskoka environment, character and economy. MWC strongly supports implementation of the District's Forest Health Program comprised of both the education component and an updated and enforceable Tree Cutting By-law.

In addition, MWC would support and urge provisions that:

1. Prevent logging operations in wetland areas.
2. Encourage property owners to prepare silvicultural prescriptions for all logging operations.
3. Establish environmental standards for operations with respect to such factors as erosion, operations near significant wildlife habitat, water crossings, excessive rutting, and logging in close proximity to lakes and rivers.

- c. Education – Growing the education sector in Muskoka has many benefits. Not only will it allow youth to remain in the community for post-secondary education, it will also encourage adults to seek further education and retraining. It will increase the numbers of well-paying jobs in the area and bring new skill sets to our communities. The examples of Trent University and Sanford Fleming College demonstrate the benefits to the City of Peterborough and satellite communities. These facilities started very small and developed an expertise in resource-based fields. Both schools are now highly regarded in their fields and bring youth and employment to the communities.
  
- d. Knowledge Sector – Muskoka has the opportunity to benefit from economic sectors that are not necessarily geographically dependent. In particular, the area has much to offer both high tech companies and other knowledge-based facilities. Access to the world via high speed internet has changed the way Canadians do business. More and more people are able to work from home. Muskoka needs to ensure that it is positioned to benefit from this connectivity. Some people have moved to Muskoka because they are easily able to communicate with the office in the GTA using the internet and video conferencing, many more would possibly come if there were expanded accessibility. This is technology that was not available in Muskoka twenty years ago and there are still areas of limited or inconsistent service. Improving broad band and cutting edge communications technology will ensure Muskoka is well positioned for future economic growth of this type. Encouraging incubator facilities that allow networking of like-minded companies would support the development of new, smaller companies.
  
- e. Dorset Environmental Science Centre (DESC) – DESC is both an educational and knowledge-based opportunity. Encouraging DESC to partner with one of the local universities to develop a broad range of science programs would not only improve research in the local area but also attract good paying jobs.

Other issues that should be identified and addressed in the development of the Muskoka vision include:

### **Stormwater**

Stormwater management is a key factor in developing environmentally sound communities. MWC encourages Muskoka to incorporate Low Impact Development (LID) into future proposals and to remediate old stormwater facilities where possible.

MWC would like to see municipal approaches to stormwater management that address both quality and quantity of stormwater runoff for new development and for redevelopment of existing sites including, but not limited to, commercial, industrial, residential subdivision, resorts, golf courses and recreational trails. A public education campaign to highlight the value of wetlands in a stormwater system and to address the harmfulness of polluted stormwater runoff to our water bodies is also recommended.

### **Power Generation**

Although the development of green energy is no longer a municipal responsibility new power generation is inevitable across the landscape of Muskoka. Power plant development will have a significant impact on the future character of the municipality. MWC encourages Muskoka District Council to take whatever steps possible to mitigate any adverse impacts.

MWC strongly supports a mandated and aggressive control and demand management program. Such a conservation program would result in reduced carbon emissions; lessen the need for expanded power

facilities and lead to improved air quality. Both urban design and building structures have a significant impact on energy use and can be influenced through municipal approvals.

Where new power generation facilities are deemed necessary, MWC encourages Muskoka to consider commenting based on the following principles:

1. Renewable energy sources are sustainable and therefore more desirable than nonrenewable energy sources.
2. Given the nature of the watersheds of Muskoka, small scale power generation projects are both economically and ecologically more viable in Muskoka and are preferred over large scale power generation projects as they require a smaller footprint and minimize disruption of the natural environment.
3. Individual power generation projects, using renewable energy sources such as hydro, solar or wind, are supported as they minimize the requirement for new transmission lines which, in turn, minimizes habitat fragmentation.
4. All new projects should limit any impact on shorelines, wetlands, fish habitat and existing large undeveloped areas. For example, hydro projects that use existing dam structures on altered sites are preferable to creating new dams, road and transmission infrastructure to access previously undisturbed waterfalls.
5. No new power source should have a negative impact on air quality.

### **Wetlands**

MWC supports the protection and preservation of all wetlands and would encourage Muskoka on an ongoing basis to identify, evaluate and take protective measures to ensure the long-term health of these essential ecosystems.

### **Bulk Water**

The bulk removal of water from the Great Lakes Basin has a significant potential impact on the water levels of both Georgian Bay and inland lakes along with impacts on coastal wetlands, especially along Georgian Bay. MWC encourages Muskoka to support the enactment of legislation to prevent further diversion or bulk removal of water out of the Great Lakes Basin.