

## Delegation to Council re Bala Falls - June 18, 2012

Your Worship, Councillors, and members of the public

My name is Peter Long, 17 Shamokin Drive, North York, M3A 3H7. I am a current director of the Muskoka Ratepayers' Association and a past president of such.

At the outset, let me make clear that the Muskoka Ratepayers Association has not taken a stand one way or the other on whether the proposed small hydro project at Bala Falls should be built. We may have our individual opinions, but as an association, we have remained neutral. If I was totally honest, a number of us wish that the proposal would just go away, and the divisiveness in the community would cease. Unfortunately, "progress" and the "traditional ways" often lead to tough decisions.

Ultimately, the decision related to Bala Falls has always been in the hands of the provincial government, and as of May 24, 2012, we believe that the decision is clear and final. There will be a hydro project at Bala Falls, and it is now time that we all work together for the best possible outcome.

Let me back up for a moment to assure you that the Ratepayers have long been looking into this project. Over the past 4 to 5 years, we have heard from many groups, both for and against the development. We have met with the MNR, the MOE, Swift River, other associations, attended public information meetings, and in 2011, listened to 37 delegations at council on Bala Falls. We even hosted Jeff Mole and Alice Murphy at a board meeting of the Ratepayers back in 2009.

It should be noted that the Muskoka Ratepayers Association does not often take a stand for or against a particular project, usually focussing its efforts on "good governance" and ensuring that the "process" has been followed. By this we mean that responsible proposals are considered, that the public has an ample opportunity to be heard, that expert opinion is brought forward, and then, based on the totality of information, council makes an informed and unbiased decision.

In the case of the North Bala Small Hydro project, we believe that the proper local process was followed, and that this was largely achieved several years ago, including the proposal to make then District land available. However, we have all witnessed strong opposition to prior decisions since the election of 2010.

No matter what our personal views are on the project, the ultimate decision on whether to go forward has always been with the Ontario government, and they have once again (and after far too long) spoken in clear terms for all. They have given approval for Option 2, and so, the project in some form WILL go ahead.

Many people are still opposed to any development at the falls, but if the project is to go ahead (which it appears that it will) most would prefer some version of option 2, and the Ratepayers agree. However, option 2 requires now-township land which has not

been made available. With no agreement in hand for this land, the developer is set on a course to develop option 1, and has filed the necessary addendum.

Not only do we believe that option 2 is the better solution, we also believe that the township would be in a stronger position to shape the final project should they support that option. An option 2 project would give the township a seat at the table. Option 1, with virtually no township contribution, would leave the township largely on the sidelines.

Given the fact that the project is going to be built, we believe that it is time for our council to enter into serious negotiations with the proponent to see if there is a possibility to do what is best for all Muskoka – switch to Option 2. This will of necessity, require Council to make the land available. This must be done in a very short time and with clarity. Swift River is currently moving ahead on the Option 1 site, and the review period is short.

If the township wants the best outcome for all Muskoka, it is time for Council to consolidate its best proposal, to sit down with Swift River and have a serious conversation about the outcome.

No one wants the legacy of a poor development on this majestic site.