



Township of Muskoka Lakes

All Candidates Meeting

September 24, 2022

Sponsored by the

Muskoka Ratepayers' Association

Candidates for Ward B and Mayor

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Overview of this Document

This document has been compiled by the Muskoka Ratepayers' Association to assist the voters of the Township of Muskoka Lakes in making an informed decision in the upcoming election on October 24, 2022.

The information was provided by the candidates in response to several questions posed by the Ratepayers to the candidates at the end of August. All information is in the candidate's words. Please note that the responses were provided in many formats (Word, email, pdf, etc.). We have converted them to a common format for inclusion in this document, and trust that the information has been copied correctly – if there are any errors, they will be noted at the meeting.

The following pages are organized by the position for which candidate is running, starting with Mayor, and followed by the Councillors for each ward (A, B, and C). Each ward elects two Township Councillors, and one District Councillor. Note that this year, all three District Councillors are running unopposed and therefore are acclaimed. Within these divisions, candidates are presented alphabetically.

All voting will be phone or internet, there are no polling stations. The Township Office at 1 Bailey Street in Port Carling will be an Election Help Centre. You will receive your voting instruction letter in the mail.

The Questions

The following questions were asked of all the candidates by the Muskoka Ratepayers' Association, and written responses were requested of each.

- 1. What improvements do you believe the next council needs to initiate to make the Township of Muskoka Lakes a better community for all residents and businesses?**
- 2. Property owners are concerned with constant tax increases. What changes, if any, would you promote to drive a more cost-effective delivery of services to your constituents?**
- 3. The Township has been updating its Official Plan and Bylaws for Site Alterations and Septic Inspections. The changes proposed are intended to improve the environment, especially in waterfront areas, but could impact costs and reduce current property rights for the majority of owners.**
 - a. Given that there is no data to support many of the proposed changes, what would you do to build a database which would justify the proposed changes?**
 - b. What major environmental improvements do you believe will result from these enhanced regulations, how will they be measured, and what additional costs will the average taxpayer incur?**
- 4. Housing affordability/attainability is a significant issue? Many of the affordability issues relate to zoning regulations especially those applicable to locations for multiple family units. What changes would you promote to make housing more affordable in Muskoka Lakes?**

Township and District Responsibilities

The Township of Muskoka Lakes is divided into 3 wards (A, B, and C). In your ward, you will be electing two Township Councillors, one District Councillor, the Mayor, and a School Trustee. All Councillors serve as Township Councillors, and the three District Councillors and the Mayor represent the Township at the District of Muskoka Council as well. There they are joined by an additional 18 Councillors and Mayors from the other component parts of the District of Muskoka – the Towns of Gravenhurst, Bracebridge, and Huntsville, and the Townships of Georgian Bay, Lake of Bays (and Muskoka Lakes).

The Township of Muskoka Lakes has responsibility for a number of areas including:

- Township Roads
- Fire and First Response
- Planning / Official Plan / By-Laws / Variances / Severances
- Building Permits and Inspections
- Community Centres and Arenas
- Parks / Trails / Docks
- Municipal Libraries
- Cemeteries

The District of Muskoka and its Council are responsible for other areas including:

- District Roads
- Water and Sewer
- Garbage and Recycling
- Policing
- Lake / Forest System Health
- Condominium / Subdivision
- Community Services
- Ambulances
- Airport
- Port Carling Locks
- James Bartleman Island Park

Please note that these lists are not exhaustive.

The Township collects all the property taxes in the Township for all levels of government, and in 2022, the tax revenues were distributed as follows:

- Township - 20.8 %
- District - 53.8 %
- Education - 25.4 %

Candidates for Mayor

Phil Harding – Mayor

Email: phil@philharding.ca

Web Site: philharding.ca

1 - Improvements for TML / Better Community:

I believe the township needs to continue streamlining services and improving accessibility for residents. Completion of online mapping of open building permits & variances, online payment of taxes, Online request for information. Better search functionality of the website. Best practice development or redevelopment information.

2 – Tax Increases / Effective Delivery

Continue with added online service delivery, reducing staff time and increasing efficiencies. Asset Management Plan, Recreational Master Plan & Fire Master Plan will help drive continued investigation into ensuring we have the right services and facilities to manage future infrastructure. Most importantly, continued relationship building with the Province & Federal Governments to ensure Muskoka Lakes gets funding for key projects. Finally, consider modifying both District and Muskoka Lakes council to ensure we have the right number of councillors, delivering the best value for the taxpayers.

3a – Data to Justify Environmental Improvements:

Data and Metrics MUST start to be collected on all thing's development. How many applications require variances, how many require studies, what studies are being required, how much cost per study is experienced. Continued water quality monitoring. I have said this numerous times but change without justification can and will have unintended consequences. If we implement too many requirements, with too much cost – people will find a way around the system, and the benefits of proposed changes will be lost.

3b – Financial Impact of Regulatory Environmental Changes:

As stated, all proposed changes are stated to “protect the environment” without metrics the ultimate impacts will not be able to be measured. Data must immediately start to be collected and evaluated, including added costs for taxpayers as well as administration in implementing the proposed changes.

4 – Affordable Housing:

We need to look to creative solutions to solve our housing issues. We need to lobby the Province to allow Multiple Dwellings on rural lots (where appropriate). We need to support the province in eliminating red tape in approving developments. In Port Carling alone, there is one approved development for 285 Homes on the Eastern Side of Town, and a second proposal west of Foodland for an additional 291 homes. Council needs to be supportive of these initiatives when

environmental impacts can be mitigated. People will always oppose change, but appropriate change is the only way we can grow and survive.

Peter Kelley – Mayor

Email: pdkelley@sympatico.ca

Web Site: peterkelley.ca

1 - Improvements for TML / Better Community:

The importance of public engagement has been overlooked by Council recently- for a variety of reasons. Council needs to improve communication with constituents to better understand the concerns and priorities of residents and local businesses. Since delegation to Council or Committee alone does not provide adequate opportunity for two-way discussion I propose to hold regularly-scheduled, open-agenda Town Hall meetings (two per ward per year, in the evening or on weekends) to allow residents (either directly or through ratepayers', cottage, neighbourhood or lake associations), local businesses and other interested parties the opportunity to have informal access to the mayor, members of council from their ward and senior Township staff.

My website identifies "Community Development" as one of the four pillars of a proposed action plan for Muskoka Lakes. In addition to promoting growth in year-round employment and the need for attainable housing (addressed elsewhere in this document) it identifies two more factors that I believe are critical to the community-building effort: the Township's publicly accessible infrastructure (community centres, arenas, parks, trails, water access, etc.) must meet the needs of all residents; and the Township must support the development of community service agencies, youth and senior's programmes and organized athletic activities.

2 – Tax Increases / Effective Delivery

I propose the following which are intended to drive efficiency in the delivery of services to our constituents:

- Reinstating the Budget Advisory Committee - participation on the BAC by citizen members, with their different insights and skillsets, should result in an initial draft budget that is more easily supported and quicker to approve.
- Introduce "zero-based budgeting" to our traditional budget process. Traditional budgeting tends to aggregate bad assumptions and magnify them year-over-year, and almost always results in expense padding. Applying ZBB principles to one-quarter of our cost centres annually would allow the entire Township budget to be run through the ZBB process once during each term of Council.
- Work with District Council to identify opportunities for economies of scale where combining the procurement of services or equipment with other municipalities may present an opportunity to drive a more cost-effective delivery of services to our constituents.
- Consider the opportunity to self-insure or to pool risk with other municipalities in an effort to contain the Township's large and fast-growing insurance expense.

3a – Data to Justify Environmental Improvements:

My proposed action plan calls for the creation of a "Century Plan" for the environment for this exact reason: we need to establish long-range, data-driven, and specific goals for the health of the key ecosystems that must be protected in our environment. Monitoring the health of these ecosystems over time will allow any deterioration to be discerned from the data quickly and remediation to commence immediately. Since remediation of water quality problems (or any number of other environmental catastrophes) can take decades, a plan of relevant data gathering, monitoring and a prescribed and timely reaction to deteriorating conditions should continue in perpetuity. "Managing for excellence" would involve setting goals to improve

environmental health over time. One hundred years may seem like forever but in reality, we are only talking about “the next generation” to a Muskoka resident born this year.

3b – Financial Impact of Regulatory Environmental Changes:

There are several environmental improvements likely to flow from the Century Plan.

- First, by setting specific goals for environmental health, monitoring relevant data, and striving to achieve these goals the Township could become leaders in the field of environmental management and could utilize concrete data to support development and planning decisions in the future.
- Next, I understand that this work could well yield a better understanding of the conditions that give rise to blue-green algal outbreaks. I understand that early detection of the conditions giving rise to an outbreak is the biggest challenge to avoiding them: the actual outbreak may well be avoided with aeration if commenced soon enough.
- I also understand that calcium deficiency in the watershed is a contributing factor to blue-green algal issues and that simple ash application to the forest can go a long way towards remediating that problem, in addition to prompting stronger and better-growing trees.
- Finally, with flooding being a new constant in our lives (likely to be exacerbated by the effects of global warming) it is worth noting that 50% of a tree’s mass is water... a healthy forest of trees storing all that water must logically reduce the volume of water available to flood boathouses and shorelines in the spring. As for the cost... the great news is that, thanks to the good work of the Muskoka Watershed Council (and other interested groups) much of the groundwork to create a science-based programme for collecting data relevant to the health of the Muskoka watershed has been done and relevant data has been collected and shared for almost 20 years. Using the existing (and still collected) data to set goals, prescribe remedial action (if necessary) and fix timelines for periodic review or reassessment could convert the work of the MWC, an advisory body, into a regulatory tool for the Township’s use at relatively little incremental cost.

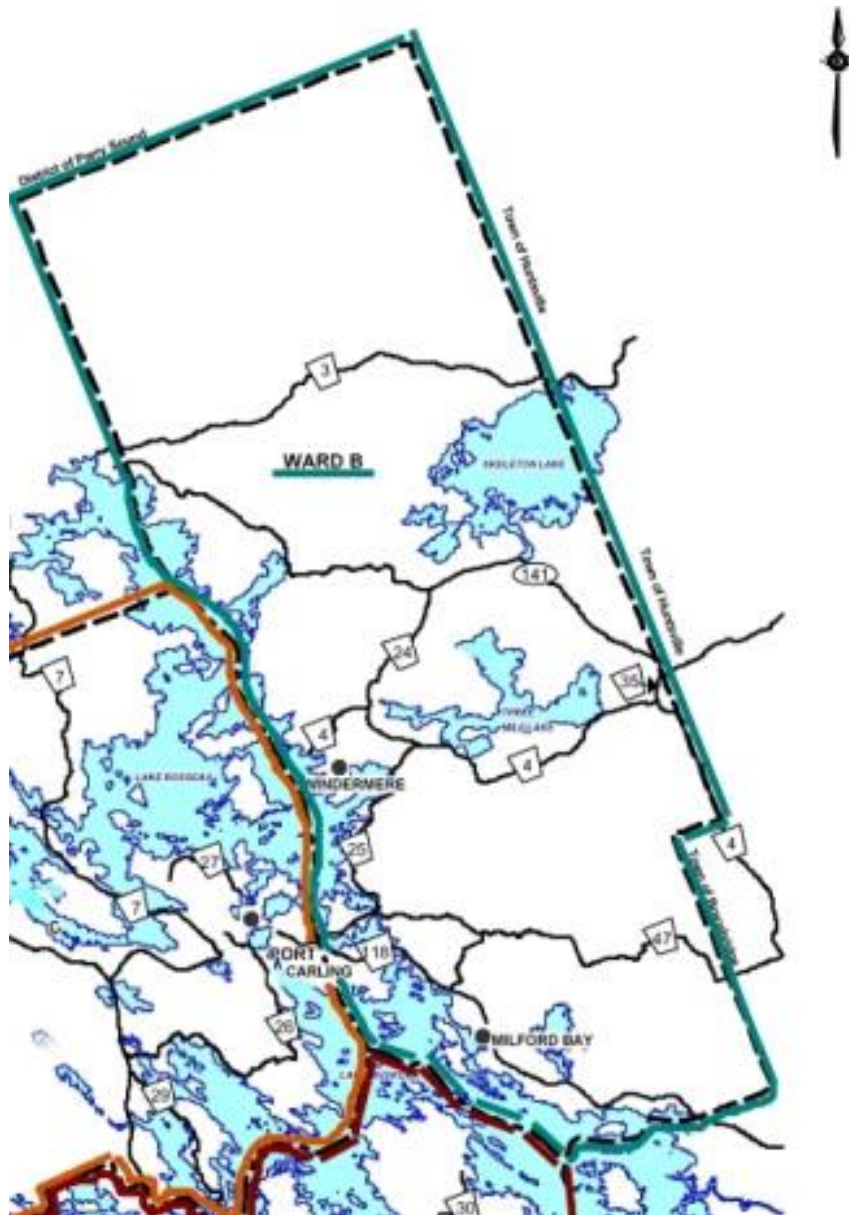
4 – Affordable Housing:

This is a huge, huge issue- not just in Muskoka but also across Ontario and most of Canada. There are some short-term actions that can be considered by the Township, such as:

- Reducing minimum size restrictions on dwellings to allow for the construction of Tiny Homes
 - Expanding the opportunity to construct secondary dwelling units in urban centres to allow for “granny flats” or garden suites.
 - Encourage more development by groups such as Habitat for Humanity, which is currently building a two-family residential property in Bala.
 - Waive fees and charges associated with new attainable residential construction and streamline the permitting and approval process to reduce construction delays.
- Many of these ideas have already been proposed, but even if they were fully rolled out my sense is that it would still be too little to address the magnitude of the current attainable housing shortage in the Township.

The District of Muskoka has an initiative called, I believe, “Housing for Everyone” which looks like a good, comprehensive approach to tackling the problem, but given the sharp increase in residential property values in Muskoka during COVID I suspect that the problem has grown considerably, and more urgency (and more resources) will be necessary to see meaningful results.

Candidates for Ward B Councillors



Allen Edwards – District Councillor – Acclaimed

Email: allenedwardsmuskoka@vianet.ca

1 - Improvements for TML / Better Community:

The next Council needs to complete the Official Plan Review and the By-Laws.

2 – Tax Increases / Effective Delivery

Complete the review of the Parks & Trails master plan which includes Community Centre's and Arenas. Also, Council should review the Master Fire Plan.

3a – Data to Justify Environmental Improvements:

Council would ask for a staff report and report back to Council.

3b – Financial Impact of Regulatory Environmental Changes:

Septic inspections will result in less pollution. If repairs are required, the owner is responsible for the cost. Site alteration by-laws will improve the environment. Any site alterations are again born by the owner. There may be an additional cost to the taxpayers due to more By-Law enforcement officers. This is what residents have been asking for.)

4 – Affordable Housing:

To make housing more affordable, the new Official Plan amendment will reduce the size of the home from 750 sq. ft. to 250 sq. ft. I would support multiple family units

Jamie Davey – Township Councillor

Email: jd@jdavey.ca

1 - Improvements for TML / Better Community:

I believe the next council should focus heavily on affordable / attainable housing as this impacts not only our residents but also employers that are desperately trying to obtain and retain employees.

To achieve this, I propose the following:

- Ensuring that planning and development processes are meeting legislated timelines.
- These timelines should be measured monthly for compliance and to ensure adequate staff resourcing is in place.
- Policies in the official plan and corresponding regulations in the implementing zoning bylaw should allow for responsible development versus forcing more and more applications through months and sometimes years long planning processes.

Council should also take a strong data and fact-based approach to prioritizing Municipal projects, making decisions on planning processes and creating/ modifying by-laws.

2 – Tax Increases / Effective Delivery

I believe at present we are trying to do too much with limited staff resources. Municipal processes should be guided by data, facts and evidence. For example, we should use data to prioritize by-law creation by evaluating the level of impact to the environment, our economy, and our residents.

We need to re-prioritize key projects only once the Municipality is in compliance with planning timelines mandated under the Planning Act and development timelines as mandated by the Ontario Building Code Act.

3a – Data to Justify Environmental Improvements:

I agree with a risk-based approach to septic inspections and would support continuing to build a database that determines the age of a system, tank sizing and type as well as proximity to waterways and associates a corresponding risk to each system. Then depending on the risk, the system can be monitored accordingly at different frequencies according to risk.

With regard to site alteration and other bylaws, I believe the current bylaws should be updated only to allow for better enforcement (part 1 vs part 3 offences) and clarity. The metrics and information from enforcement activities can then be used to further tweak bylaws as necessary. We should focus more on educational initiatives to promote bylaw compliance as an alternative to fines.

In terms of the Official plan, I feel we have gone too far by increasing development restrictions and requiring environmental assessments. The existing provisions are adequate and can be tweaked slightly as required.

We need to be able to quantify the impact of policies and regulations under a new zoning bylaw on properties and therefore need to understand what the existing properties look like currently in the

township in terms of size, lot coverage, frontage etc. corresponding to zoning. This data needs to be compiled as a first step, then the impacts of policy, regulations and the required planning resourcing can be determined.

There needs to be a balance between as-of-right permissions and regulations that take into consideration existing lot details.

3b – Financial Impact of Regulatory Environmental Changes:

I believe these enhanced regulations will bring awareness to owners of properties with septic systems to ensure that they are operating efficiently and effectively. Generally, the additional costs would be repairs to septic systems to be in compliance with the Ontario Building Code and staffing of probably an additional full-time position specializing in on-site sewage systems this should be considered regardless for succession planning purposes.

4 – Affordable Housing:

Yes - Housing affordability/attainability is a key issue. I think we need to ensure we have a flexible Official plan that supports housing as a priority. Part of that is to ensure we focus on development that leads to the best return on capital infrastructure such as roads, water, sewer, services etc. We need to allow for flexibility to develop in both community and rural zones but also allow for the expansion and redevelopment of waterfront residences brought on by remote work opportunities and the retiring workforce.

Then, the implementing zoning bylaw needs to reflect this policy to allow single family and multiple family units to occur as-of-right so that these development projects are not bogged down by unnecessary and lengthy planning processes.

Susan Mazan – Township Councillor

Email: mazan4muskoka@gmail.com

1 - Improvements for TML / Better Community:

Healthy communities include having access to appropriate housing and reliable, high-speed broadband. Both require working with different levels of government and private service providers to affect meaningful change (please see below re: housing)

As part of the TML broadband working group, I believe that continuing advocacy and partnership with different stakeholders will be an important initiative in the next term of council. The Provincial Government recently announced results of a reverse auction, releasing money for providers to work towards the goal of 50/10 broadband connectivity for every household by 2025. It will be very important to bring a TML perspective to ensure all residents and businesses, including those in the more rural settings, are included in plans. Details are anticipated in the coming months.

The Community Improvement Plan intends to enhance our downtown infrastructure and public spaces. With funds available for both public and private initiatives, implementation and support of the plans will be important in the next term of council.

Another element to fostering healthy communities is support for relevant four-season recreation and community spaces. The recently endorsed Recreation Master Plan creates a roadmap for future councils and its implementation should be a priority for the next term of council.

2 – Tax Increases / Effective Delivery

Knowing that the largest source of revenue for the Township is from property tax and that only 20 percent is used to fund services provided by the Township (with 50 percent going to the District), managing the budget to match the needs of the community is a top priority.

The Township recently completed a number of foundational plans (asset management, recreation master plan, fire master plan, IT master plan, transportation master plan) that will help form decision making around spending. It will be important that the next term of council works with the public and staff to determine appropriate service levels, matching community needs with operating costs and long-term capital spending.

Using the recreation master plan as an example, having a comprehensive plan improves opportunities for grants from other levels of government. In addition, a key direction includes the importance of public/private partnerships. These are a couple of other ways to help offset the tax burden.

In considering service levels, a goal should be that with appropriate governance, to reduce or have no duplication in effort internally or with other levels of government. An example of this is the current approach to climate change with the District being the lead, with input and “a voice at the table” from the Townships.

3a – Data to Justify Environmental Improvements:

Official Plan

The Official Plan has been a 3-year process with significant public input. Staff and consultants have used the best data available from environmental experts to form the current draft official plan recommendations.

Site Alteration and Tree Preservation By Law

As noted by staff, the environmental science indicates that shoreline buffers are critical to watershed health and impacts (i.e., building) should generally be avoided in the first 30 m. (Muskoka Watershed Council - Shoreline Buffers 2013 is a great resource).

While this by-law is not yet complete, it should be noted that a new recommendation (or new property right) which would allow patios within the first 50 ft is an example of staff finding a balance between environmental guidance and property owners enjoyment of their property.

Septic Inspections

The septic re-inspection program is in place to mitigate the impacts of failing sewage systems and for protection of the watershed. Staff are currently creating a database with ratings for every septic in the township. Early reports showed 40 percent were in a high-risk category. With this data, it will help guide the inspection program. Costs incurred by property owners to improve systems will vary depending upon the state of their septic system. Costs to manage the program and options on how to do so are yet to be determined.

3b – Financial Impact of Regulatory Environmental Changes:

Candidate provided a single answer to both parts a and b of this question – see above.

4 – Affordable Housing:

Housing options that are affordable and attainable are an important part of a healthy community. There is a national housing crisis which will require policies and incentives at all levels of government. Specific to the Township of Muskoka Lakes' ability to spur development, council has undertaken a few initiatives.

For example, within the draft OP, there are polices allowing for pre-zoning of housing developments in appropriate locations, and to allow for the waiving of fees (i.e., permits and site plans). Through the recently endorsed CIP, the Community Improvement Plan Private Sector Incentive Program creates three different funding stream opportunities for appropriate developments; fee rebate, constructions grants and tax increment grants. Community awareness of these programs is set to launch this fall. Through the attainable housing committee there are funds available for fee rebates for different fees (i.e., planning, building).

The goal of the above initiatives is to reduce red tape and timing, and to provide financial support for appropriate developments. The next term of council will want to assess the uptake of these programs and continue to support these and other initiatives.

Gordon Roberts – Township Councillor

Email: gordonrobertsmuskoka@gmail.com

1 - Improvements for TML / Better Community:

I believe that the Township needs to:

- Get the Zoning By-laws right. The Official Plan sets out the overall policies. What really matters however is how it is implemented. The By-Laws need to be clearly written and the requirements easy to understand.
- Streamline Township processes and decision making.
- Actively pursuing opportunities to help businesses and organizations, new and old, develop and prosper. With a couple of caveats – 1) that they will not negatively impact the quality of Muskoka’s Water, and 2) that any development must be done responsibly, mindful of their impact on the well being of other people and organizations in Muskoka.
- Develop, in conjunction with other organizations, credible action plans for the most urgent issues facing the Township such as affordable housing, improving healthcare, effective septic management, short term rentals, managing costs, and eliminating duplication wherever possible.
- Ensure that the concerns and ideas of all the citizens, businesses and organizations are fully understood. The voice of all, not just the few, must be heard and assessed.

2 – Tax Increases / Effective Delivery

Obviously, property taxes are the biggest source of funds to pay for the services provided by the Township. Recognizing that the District receives approximately 50% of the tax levy and only 20% of taxes flow back to the Township, I would do the following:

- Set up a working group to
 - a) identify opportunities for cost reductions for services provided by the District of Muskoka, and
 - b) pressure the District for relief.
- Arrange for Township staff to identify opportunities for attracting more revenue.
- Establish a task force to determine:
 - a) Can the service be provided by using a user pay approach?
 - b) If every option has been explored to provide the same or equivalent service at a lower cost?
 - c) What are other municipalities doing that we can learn from to reduce costs?

3a – Data to Justify Environmental Improvements:

I believe that there will be environmental improvements forthcoming from these proposed changes.

Preserving the quality of the water in Muskoka is significantly important because the well-being of everyone living and working in Muskoka, let alone attending on a seasonal basis, is clearly

dependent on it. In my mind environmental quality (especially water) is not subject to debate. Even the smallest improvement in water quality is important.

Water Quality is not just an environmental issue but a fundamental factor in Muskoka's economic success or failure. If water quality deteriorates so does tourism, property values, local job opportunities and personal incomes, let alone enjoyment by seasonal residents.

3b – Financial Impact of Regulatory Environmental Changes:

Candidate provided a single answer to both parts a and b of this question – see above.

4 – Affordable Housing:

Addressing housing affordability/attainability is a complex issue which will require the participation of all levels of government and the private sector.

I will:

- Examine, with Planning Staff, the possible options to reduce/waive Township development costs.
- Encourage Township's District Councillors to lead the formation of a District and Municipality task force to address this challenging subject.