



THE DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY OF MUSKOKA

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Office of the District Chair

September 13, 2007

Mr. Doug Downey, Chair
Panel on the Future of the
Trent-Severn Waterway
185 King Street, Unit 100
Peterborough, ON K9J 2R8

Dear Mr. Downey:

Re: Written Submission re: Request for Input to the
Panel on the Future of the Trent-Severn Waterway

On behalf of Muskoka District Council, please find attached our response to the Panel on the Future of the Trent-Severn Waterway's request for input.

Muskoka District Council would like to thank the Panel for providing the opportunity to comment on this initiative, and look forward to receiving further information as the project moves forward.

Yours truly,

Gord Adams
District Chair

Attch.

Managing Our Legacy Together



THE DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY OF MUSKOKA

PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
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TO: Chair and Members
Planning and Economic Development Committee

FROM: Melissa Maurer
Planner

DATE: August 8, 2007

SUBJECT: Panel on the Future of the Trent-Severn Waterway

REPORT NO: PED-13-2007-2

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Report No. PED-13-2007-2, dated August 8, 2007 be submitted on behalf of Muskoka District Council in response to the Panel on the Future of the Trent-Severn Waterway's request for input.

ORIGIN

On May 11, 2007, Parks Canada named an independent six-member panel to provide recommendations on the future of the Trent-Severn Waterway (TSW). The panel has been asked to focus on new visions and mechanisms to ensure the waterway's long-term effectiveness, sustainability and potential contributions to the communities along the waterway. The TSW faces a number of key issues, including deteriorating infrastructure, protecting natural resources, changing visitor patterns, as well as issues surrounding the legislative and legal ownership framework for the waterway, which leads to questions of mandate, legislation and jurisdiction. In response to some municipal concerns, the Minister of the Environment, the Honourable John Baird, has, through the attached press release, stated that the intent of this panel is not to download costs of operating the TSW, but rather to engage stakeholders in a discussion on the waterway's future.

ANALYSIS

The District of Muskoka has been asked to provide input to this panel on the Trent-Severn Waterway (a copy of the letter is attached to this report). A meeting was held with Area Municipal and Watershed Council staff to discuss the six (6) specific questions that were provided for consideration by the panel. In summary, the following are the key items that were discussed.

Values of the Waterway to Muskoka

The waterway is a source of tourism and recreation within this area of Muskoka. As much of the land along the TSW that is within Muskoka does not have road access, this area is in a relatively natural state with some seasonal cottage development. The Big Chute area of the TSW has historical significance, as do many other locations along the waterway, which should be protected. Little Lake, located west of Port Severn, is the source of municipal drinking water for this urban centre, and as such, the water quality of the TSW is very important. It is also recognized that the TSW is an area of ecological sensitivity, with known significant habitat of several species at risk located within and along the waterway.

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The most westerly limit of the waterway (from the west side of Highway 400 at Port Severn to Georgian Bay) has also been designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a Littoral Biosphere Reserve for the unique ecosystem it contains. Although the Biosphere Reserve designation does not affect existing jurisdictions, it does create a forum for cooperation and operates through community partnerships, and provides an opportunity to showcase this unique part of Muskoka on an international stage.

Are Current Water Management Decisions Meeting the Needs of Muskoka?

The background papers prepared by the Panel state that there are currently 160 dams and water control structures along the navigation corridor including the 41 Haliburton reservoir lakes which are essential to both the waterway's continued presence and the economies of the communities along it. Without controlled water levels along the waterway, there would be less shoreline and lake area, limited or no access to adjacent lakes, and a greater risk from fluctuating water levels and flooding. The original intent of the management of water levels along the waterway was for commercial navigation, hydropower and the spring movement of logs. As such, the water allocation demands and expectations of current development along some portions of the waterway are difficult to meet with the existing systems and resources. Notwithstanding this, it would appear that current water level management decision-making generally responds to the needs of Muskoka.

Current Agencies and Governmental Co-operation

Numerous federal, provincial, and municipal government agencies and First Nations are involved and interested in the administration of aspects of the waterway corridor. There are also many citizen-driven organizations and industry associates advocating for the environment, cultural heritage, economic stability, cottagers and residents. According to the background information provided by the panel, as many as ten different agencies issue permits for in-water work in the waterway corridor, all with their own regulatory instruments and policies. In addition, each municipality has its own Official Plan and Comprehensive Zoning Bylaw, which set varying standards for development along the waterway.

Improved communication and coordination between Parks Canada and local municipalities regarding shoreline structures along the waterway would be beneficial. Parks Canada has, in most cases, more stringent requirements for these types of facilities than area municipal zoning by-laws and additional discussions between Parks Canada and the municipalities could result in more consistency. According to the background papers prepared by the Panel, the coordination of in-water, waterfront and backshore development permitting is one area being examined by the Panel. They also acknowledge that improved permitting and enforcement capacity would in turn benefit the natural environment along the waterway.

How Can Communities Benefit Economically, Environmentally, and Socially from a Sustainable Waterway?

The Panel has identified in its background papers that the modern waterway must, in a sustainable manner, contribute to the recreational and lifestyle economy, provide access to water-based enjoyment, support green power generation, protect natural resources and critical community water resources, contribute to economically sustainable communities, and tell a compelling story of the evolution of Central Ontario and canal technology.

There are many ways in which Muskoka is known to benefit from this waterway in general. The waterway acts as a tourist attraction and provides access to many seasonal cottages that cannot be accessed by road. Areas such as Big Chute and Severn Falls are of historical significance to the waterway, and Muskoka benefits from their enhancement and protection. As a national historic site, the waterway makes this area of Muskoka among the most treasured in Canada.

The provision of clean drinking water as well as the safe removal of sewage is also important, and as such, municipal drinking water and sanitary sewage systems have been installed in Port Severn. However, only Muskoka residents currently benefit from these services. If municipal services were available in the portion of Port Severn which is outside of Muskoka, the water quality of the waterway could be further protected and economic development facilitated. In addition, it would be beneficial if facilities owned by TSW were connected to municipal services where available.

The Muskoka portion of the waterway has been placed within the South Georgian Bay-Lake Simcoe watershed region for the purposes of Source Water Protection planning. Source Water Protection is a provincial initiative to protect sources of municipal drinking water within Ontario. As the source of water for the Port Severn water treatment facility is Little Lake, which is part of the waterway, a coordinated approach to the protection of this water resource is extremely important.

The continued operation of the waterway in a manner that maximises tourism possibilities yet protects natural features and functions would also benefit the local area. The installation and maintenance of facilities along the waterway which provide services for its users, such as washroom facilities, picnic areas and historical information kiosks, could potentially make the waterway a destination for users in addition to a travel route from one area to another. There are currently no public docks along the waterway within Port Severn, which makes accessing the waterway by the general public an issue. In addition, several large marinas along the waterway have closed in recent years and several more are anticipating closure in the near future, which leads to questions about the viability of the waterway as a tourist destination in its current form. Government initiatives could potentially target these areas and develop public access with facilities for its guests as a way to increase tourism to not only the community, but to the waterway as a whole. Background discussion papers suggest that the creation of an economic development vision and supporting strategies based on sustainable principles for the entire waterway may be one way to comprehensively approach this subject. The Panel points out that the strategies could focus on investments in public infrastructure and other public amenities in waterway communities; including such items as investment into the promotion and designation of scenic routes. Muskoka would benefit from these types of investments, and they should be encouraged.

Cultural Heritage

There are many sites along the portion of the waterway within Muskoka that have historical value. For example, the marine railway that is in operation at Big Chute is the only one of its kind in North America. The Parks Canada building on site also provides an exhibit on the history of Big Chute, helping make it one of the most visited locks along the entire waterway. However, the installation and maintenance of information kiosks or interpretive centres elsewhere along the waterway could make the waterway more of an attraction. Sightseeing information could be compiled and provided in a concise package to offer users a tour of significant and interesting locations along the waterway. Background discussion papers suggest that emphasis has been placed on the integrity of the historic structures as the determinant of national significance which overwhelms and obscures other important historic values. As the Panel points out, there are many other items that hold historical significance to the residents and visitors of the waterway. They go on to suggest that perhaps one way to learn more about these lesser known features is to engage local residents to share their stories about the waterway, and use that information in such items as information kiosks and brochures. The development of these services for the users of the waterway would add value for the users as well as the local communities, and Muskoka would encourage their development and implementation.

Protection of the Natural Environment

The protection of the natural environment should continue to be a priority for all levels of government. In the Parks Canada 2005 State of the Environment report, several issues and trends were identified as posing a concern for the environmental sustainability of the waterway. Five key environmental issues have been discussed in the background papers prepared by the Panel: waterfront development and shoreline hardening, wetland loss, upland habitat loss and fragmentation, eutrophication, and invasive species.

In January 2003, Muskoka District Council approved the Muskoka Water Strategy. The Strategy is a comprehensive framework of integrated strategic initiatives to protect Muskoka's water resources. A significant component of that Strategy is Lake System Health, which uses implementation techniques to ensure the sustainable use and development of water resources in Muskoka. The Trent-Severn Waterway is considered "Moderately Sensitive" to phosphorus loading in Muskoka's water quality model. As such, all substantial development along the waterway is to be subject to site plan control which is to be used to ensure existing natural shoreline buffers are maintained, or to require re-vegetation where it has been removed. Increased setbacks for leaching beds are also required as a part of this policy.

As part of this strategy, recreational water quality monitoring is conducted each summer throughout Muskoka, and support is given to various stewardship initiatives as requested. As part of the stewardship program, Muskoka staff provide education to stakeholders on the problem of invasive species, and provide information on where they can learn more about this issue. Muskoka has also worked with Ducks Unlimited to update the wetland mapping used in the development application process. In addition, large portions of the land along the waterway is located within nine (9) Muskoka Heritage Areas and two (2) Crown Land Conservation Reserves. The Muskoka Official Plan states that Heritage Areas are generally defined as those areas of Muskoka's landscape that are on a local, district, provincial or federal scale, exhibit entities of historic, geologic, archaeologic, scenic or other heritage value (such as biologic). No development is permitted within a Heritage Area unless it can be demonstrated that there will be no negative impacts on the features and/or functions for which the Heritage Area was identified.

The waterway also contains habitat for many Species at Risk, as defined by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Increased research on, and mapping of, significant habitat of species at risk along the waterway would assist in its further protection.

Unregulated camping on Crown land along the waterway is also an emerging issue. Several Crown land camping and picnic sites along the waterway are being misused, which negatively impacts the environment. We would recommend that these areas be maintained more effectively, with increased maintenance schedules, restroom facilities, and increased monitoring of the sites while in use, to ensure the ecosystems along the waterway are protected.

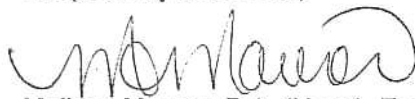
Increasing Demands on the Waterway from Greater Golden Horseshoe

As demand increases for tourism opportunities within 1 to 2 hours of the Greater Golden Horseshoe area, the waterway stands to benefit substantially from this increased activity. In particular, Port Severn, which is the western terminus of the waterway, could be marketed as the western "gateway" to the Trent-Severn, and provide tourists with supplies, lodging and services. Many tourists currently use the locks near Port Severn as a means to visit the community while on the waterway, however recent reductions in the hours of operation of the locks occasionally lead to challenges when attempting to visit or leave this area. For example, the Port Severn locks close at 7 pm between June 22 and September 3, thereby making it difficult for some visitors to boat into Port Severn for dinner. Increased hours of operation during this time of the year could assist with this issue. Increased public docking with visitor facilities (ie. public restrooms, showers, picnic areas, parking) within Port Severn could also better serve tourists of the area. The background discussion papers prepared by the Panel state that one possible solution is working with local municipalities towards a regional strategy for open space provisions along the waterway, including the identification of areas and sites with potential to serve the anticipated future demand, and should be encouraged.

SUMMARY

The Trent-Severn Waterway is an important resource and continued efforts to ensure that its social, environmental, and economic values are preserved and enhanced are encouraged. Staff will continue to monitor this initiative and will provide further updates to Committee as more information becomes available.

Respectfully submitted,



Melissa Maurer, B.A. (Hons), Eco. Mgt. (Dipl)
Planner