

MUSKOKA LAKES CHAMBER BUSINESS FORUM

Questions to Mayoral Candidates

Video Link (Mayoral Candidates begin speaking at 5:28 on this video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hoDCx9MSfA>

Questions and responses were grouped in four Categories as shown in below Table of Contents. The following are responses from Candidates Phil Harding and Peter Kelley.

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PHIL HARDING

Candidate Harding chose to answer the questions in summary form for all four categories. His responses are below.

MUSKOKA HOUSING ISSUE

We need to say “YES” and we need to be strong when people in our communities next to potential developments oppose these developments.

We need to be creative with staff housing. One solution is already in the works which is a staff housing development associated with the new Minett development.

Staff housing should be available all over Muskoka. And clearly the MLA/ FOM don't like my approach.

We need to continue working with the chamber and all business to support workers and finding workers.

Attainable housing is supported by the district of Muskoka and TML with incentives from both. And yes, this includes rural Muskoka.

BUSINESS IN MUSKOKA, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COLLABORATION

I would like to encourage year round business with incentives to stay open and or other creative ideas to meet the needs of business. We need to do a better job with our economic development committee. This past term, there was lots of talk, not a lot of action. I do take personal responsibility for this, as I should have stepped in earlier to help and support the Economic Development Committee. I will have closer oversight next term. And I have a 12 year track record for accountability. I don't promise what I can't deliver.

All other questions of business in Muskoka can be summarized by – we need to work closer with the chamber and we need more action from our economic development committee.

Tourism must be built. Our economy has changed from tourism to construction. We need to continue to find unique ways to bring people to Muskoka and to bring more business to Muskoka, much the same way that the Movie Production did this past summer.

PETER KELLEY

Candidate Kelley answered all questions submitted.

HOUSING & TALENT

- a. According to the Ontario government's goal of 1.5 million new homes within 10 years, Muskoka is short 4,400 homes already and within 10 years that increases to 6,700. What are you planning to do or think could be done in Muskoka Lakes to help close the gap?

Short term actions that should be considered include: reducing minimum size restrictions on dwellings to allow for Tiny Homes; expand opportunity to construct secondary dwelling units on lots in urban centres to permit “granny flats”/garden suites; encourage more builds by Habitat for Humanity; waive fees, permit costs on new attainable housing construction; and streamline permitting and approval processes to reduce delays. Longer term: consider expansion of serviced areas in Bala, Port Carling and also work with province to allow increased ability for lot subdivision in rural areas where appropriate.

- b. Do you have a vision of how this council could be led to attend to the issue of staff and housing availability as equally as it pays attention to waterfront properties?

A focus on Community Development, as called for in the plan I set out in my website www.peterkelley.ca highlights the need to create more attainable housing (among other things) in order to promote growth in the community of permanent residents. Housing seasonal staff in homes previously occupied by permanent resident families exacerbates the problem, but there is no easy solution to ease the housing shortage except for a commitment to the

development of attainable housing. I would note, too, that requiring resort developments to house staff onsite is also a good step.

- c. If elected, will you encourage affordable housing in both urban and rural areas, or will you feel obligated to respond to associations such as MLA/FriendsofMuskoka that appear to be against such development in your decision making?

I'm not aware of any opposition by either MLA or FOM to the development of affordable housing in both urban and rural areas, and a quick google search of the policies of these two organizations has turned up nothing. However, I support the development of affordable/attainable housing in both urban and rural areas within the Township, with the obvious condition that appropriate environmental controls be in place for such developments.

- d. What would you do to help Council and staff bring talent and skilled workers to Muskoka Lakes?

I would promote the idea of developing the campus for a trade school within the Township to train/certify students in technical skills most in demand here- construction trades, marine mechanics, etc. This could have the collateral benefits of easing the skilled worker shortage, broadening our economy into a "knowledge-based" economy and, with some logistical planning, could promote the development of dormitory housing to accommodate students for 8 months of the year and seasonal staff for the rest of the year.

- e. Does the Official Plan include a Directive to develop municipal incentives to build off water attainable housing in Muskoka Lakes (attainable housing is considered housing affordable for the working class)? If not, why not or why do you think it isn't there?

The current draft Official Plan, which Township Council could approve as soon as this week, does contain policy directives to "ensure that an adequate supply of land and housing choices are available" for "present and future residents of all ages, abilities, incomes", including specifically the development of attainable housing. It further encourages the use of surplus public lands for attainable housing.

DOING BUSINESS IN MUSKOKA LAKES

(Conditions for Business and Sector Specific Questions)

- a. How should Township plan to help small business through the looming recession, and how are you planning to stay accountable on those promises?

A few thoughts- I think that working with partners like the Chamber of Commerce the Township can maintain marketing and promotional campaigns to encourage the tourism trade to continue through whatever economic crisis arises... we need to project a strong "brand image" through all economic times. The Township also needs to remain flexible (like it was during the COVID crisis) to allow for quick adaptation to meet changing economic conditions. All of this will depend upon strong communication between the business community and the Township, through ongoing town hall meetings as proposed in my plan (www.peterkelley.ca), continued participation with the Chamber Board and through a strong relationship between our Economic Development Specialist and the Chamber's Executive Director.

- b. What is your position on development restrictions versus economic vitality?
I'm not sure that I understand this question, but I do intend to live up to the statement that in the Township of Muskoka Lakes the environment comes first. Sacrificing environmental protection for any kind of activity, economic or otherwise, is short-term thinking that will, if left unchecked, ultimately cause the death of the local economy. Again, a look at my plan (www.peterkelley.ca) will highlight my goal of ongoing monitoring and data collection regarding the environmental health of the Township of Muskoka Lakes in order to put some "science" around the mechanisms that the Township will use to protect the environment appropriately.

- c. When can we start to lobby ride share services like Uber to operate here?

The question noted these are major drivers of local travel and hospitality. I don't know anything about the ride share economy except that it is an open, free market and if any service decides to operate here I'd be happy to talk to them to better understand their plans and how they might service the needs of our residents.

- d. Muskoka Lakes is revising its Official Plan. Presently the lower floor of a boathouse can only be used for boats and related items. Do you support, or not support, residential use (bedrooms, recreation, etc.) in this space? Please be specific about the use you support, and why?

The present draft Official Plan, which is still the subject of discussion and debate, provides that the majority of the lower floor of a boathouse must be utilized for boats and the storage of other recreational equipment. The rest of the ground floor may

include “recreational floor area”, which I equate to lounge space, but not areas for sleeping nor for cooking facilities. As one of the members of the Official Plan Review working group, which group was responsible for the OP overhaul, I support this change, however I am obligated by statute to remain open minded until the draft OP is finalized and put to Council for approval.

- e. If the lakes continue to have blue/green algae blooms, our livelihood will be affected. Do you have a plan for the monitoring of old septic beds?

Yes, the Township has a plan for monitoring all septic systems with inspection frequency tied to the age of the system in question. The plan will hopefully be approved shortly and inspections can begin immediately thereafter. I would point out, however, that septic failure is not the only cause of blue- green algal outbreaks and the Township must look at other contributing factors to successfully combat this problem.

- f. How will you encourage new business when there are staff shortages and most of the businesses in town are presently real estate offices?

There are several issues here. First, I believe in a free market, and as such I think most of these problems are best resolved by entrepreneurs, not government. Second, the fact that there are so many real estate offices is a testament to the incredible draw of our Township, its natural beauty and clean water. Those businesses are also key, I believe, to the continued success of our local property development and builder businesses. The labour shortage that has plagued much of the Muskoka economy is also a problem throughout the rest of Canada, and also the United States... it is not ours to solve alone. I do think that diversifying the local economy to include such activities as a knowledge-based economy (see my answer to question 1(d), above), distribution or call-centre work could allow new business development that is both environmentally-compatible with Township goals and draws upon a different type of workforce demographic than that which is in such short supply at present.

- g. In this question, the person asking suggests that the lack of affordable housing is tied to short-term rentals. They ask: What action(s) would you support the Township take to address this situation....and....Do you support a minimum 30 day stay for short term rentals?

There are plenty of reasons for the lack of affordable housing in the Township and short-term rental activity is but one of them. My plan (www.peterkelley.ca) includes a focus on STRs, but more specific to controlling the inappropriate behaviour that seems to accompany some STR properties. I do think that licensing STR activity might be necessary, as would minimum stays, occupancy limits and property-owner accountability for renter behaviour. At present I don't

know what minimum stay would make sense so I won't comment on the 30-day minimum called out by the questioner.

- h. A survey of Muskoka Lakes residents in 2018 showed 70 percent of them supported allowing legal cannabis sales. At the time, Council decided to take a wait and see position. Today we're the only township in the entire riding that still doesn't allow this...and in the recent term, all but one Councillor voted against cannabis retail. **For candidates who are campaigning to return:** Why are you stopping a legal business from setting up here.... For all candidates; Today, would you vote to allow or disallow legal cannabis stores in Muskoka Lakes? If you would vote against, what is your reasoning for doing so?

I'll own this one- I was one of the Councillors who voted against opening the Township to cannabis retail. I was concerned about the possibility of illicit behaviour in connection with such activity, and other matters which, based on the experience elsewhere, were unfounded. I even expressed a concern echoing the question in 2(f.), above, that those commercial buildings not already occupied by real estate offices would soon be filled with cannabis retailers to the exclusion of all other "traditional" Muskoka businesses. While I'm obligated to keep an open mind I suspect that since my early objections are gone I would likely vote differently if the matter came to council again.

- i. COVID made it hard for the public to engage with the Township planning department, which slowed my business from getting open. What can Council do to improve or speed up such service for businesses?

COVID created unbelievable stress on our staff, as it did on employees of every other customer-facing entity around the world. I am extremely proud of how our staff stayed focused on the task at hand and did everything within its power to rise above the limitations and provide the best service possible under the circumstances. However, COVID has also meant that we have perhaps gone too long without evaluating how our service deliverables match the needs of our constituents in the real-world of today's business. I've dealt with similar problems in my previous career as a business leader...this type of problem usually comes down to basic "blocking and tackling" and is best addressed through ongoing process improvement to identify and streamline unnecessary delays, duplicated processes, too many "hand offs" and to promote any opportunity to streamline, reduce and save time. I think we need to start with some open communication with those concerned about the Township's service levels - to better understand new service expectations and gaps in the Township's ability to to meet them. The Township also needs to communicate any permanent limitations that might now exist on our ability to meet service expectations. The Township has terrific staff, and I'm confident that each one of them really does want to live up to the expectations of those constituents that they service. Some leadership around

facilitated communication with those businesses most affected would, I think, yield better communication and some quick improvement in the service level that the Township is able to provide.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COLLABORATION

- a. What do you think should be in a 5-year plan to accelerate economic growth throughout the region?

Some elements of a 5 year plan : economic diversification (develop a knowledge-based component to our economy, an institute for environmental science or as a training centre for the trades); focus our tourist activity in the off-season to attract non-traditional visitors (eco-tourism, Chautauqua Institute-type education, lecture and theatre productions); develop and promote the “brand” to attract business-conference and educational activity in the off-season; promote Muskoka as an ideal location for movie production; look at light manufacturing, distribution and service industry opportunities (call centres, etc.) to take advantage of proximity to Toronto and all major markets.

- b. The Township collaborates with many organizations for the betterment of the community. The Chamber is one of them. If elected, what’s your vision for collaboration with the Chamber during your term?

I think that nominating a Councillor to sit on the Chamber Board is a good idea. (Full disclosure- I was that Councillor this term.) I understand the concerns around the need to recuse on matters that come to Council relating to the Chamber but it is a legal requirement that and a small price to pay (I can only recall it happening on three occasions during this last term) in exchange for the access to relevant business information that Council gains from the relationship. I also think it would be helpful to have a Chamber representative sit on the Economic Development Committee (as a Committee Member as opposed to a present advisory role only). I would propose to have a mandate for the Committee to grow economic opportunity in the Township and report directly to Council.

- c. There are 6 municipalities but none to call that represents Muskoka overall. If a business wants to start up somewhere in Muskoka.... Who do they call? What would you do to solve this problem?

Well, I’ve been told that most of these businesses end up calling Norah Fountain first, so I’m not sure where the problem is. In fact, I think that during the next term of Council the Mayor needs to work with the Township’s Economic Development Specialist, senior staff members, Chamber representatives and local business leaders to form an outreach program to “recruit” compatible business opportunities to the Township. At the very least this team should be a “welcoming committee” of

sorts to make sure that anyone interested in starting, expanding, relocating or acquiring a business feels that Muskoka Lakes is a welcoming and business-friendly place to consider locating.

- d. What has the present Economic Development policy of Muskoka Lakes done for our business community, and what would you change in a Township Economic Development program going forward?

I think much of this has been covered in the answers to several of the questions, above.

- e. As a business member of the chamber, I'm frustrated by a lack of communication between Council and the chamber. The councillor appointed to the Chamber Board recuses whenever chamber issues are brought to council. Can you suggest a better way to improve council and business relations going forward?

As for one way to improve the working relationship between the Chamber and Council please see my answer to question 3(b.), above. The only way to avoid the legal obligation to recuse in this circumstance is to have the Councillor in question participate with the Chamber in some role other than as a member of the Chamber's Board. I'm not sure if that lesser role would provide meaningful enough insight to warrant the time commitment.

- f. Our bylaws are the backbone of our municipality. While many new bylaws have been introduced, and more are coming, what are you going to do as mayor to ensure these bylaws are enforced?

This is a huge issue- thankfully you can see some of my plan for improved bylaw enforcement at www.peterkelley.ca. This is the single most common concern I've heard while campaigning- we need to enforce our bylaws. I completely agree. I think it's partly a matter of more equipment, better tools, and perhaps some training in technique to boost confidence in the process. In my opinion, our bylaw enforcement team is excellent and knows it's role very well, but for some reason there's little deterrent built into our bylaws to curb unwanted behaviour. Council needs to get creative and consider non-traditional measures (licenses for certain activities which will be suspended for repeated breaches, fines tied to property value, etc.) to make the consequences of a bylaw breach truly consequential to the offender.

- g. While The township has gone from one bylaw officer to two-and-a-half recently, there is still no one on duty from noon Friday and over the weekend when most noise, fireworks, and short term rental issues occur. What will you do to ensure that complaints are effectively followed up and violators caught?

We need to make sure that our bylaw enforcement team is on duty when offences are most likely to occur, and that they have the necessary tools and equipment to do the job well.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND SEASONALITY

- a. How would you improve the staff situation for summer businesses that rely on seasonal staff?

I'm not sure that the best solution to this business problem will come from the government. However, perhaps consider an incentive for local residents to take in seasonal boarders for summer staff, or perhaps a marketing program promoting the off-work recreational activities available to summer students and targeting potential seasonal staff from outside the Township.

- b. One questioner commented... The election campaign has been made ugly by the Friends of Muskoka/MLA. If elected, how will you address what some see as an 'abuse of power' by associations and how can you ensure that all Muskoka Lakes residents are represented in future votes?

Well, let's start with full disclosure- I am the candidate that both the Muskoka Lakes Association and the Friends Of Muskoka chose to support as the Mayoral candidate for the Township of Muskoka Lakes. The reader might want to bear this in mind when considering my answer. I would be interested to hear how the MLA/FOM made the campaign "ugly" and how someone sees the actions of these two groups as an "abuse of power", because I don't share those feelings. As for the issue of ensuring that "all Muskoka Lakes residents are represented in future votes" I would point out that every eligible voter has but one vote and the best way to ensure representation is to exercise your right to vote. Unfortunately, only about 41% of eligible voters in the Township chose to vote in the last municipal election.

- c. What would you do to increase tourism in the shoulder and winter months in Muskoka Lakes?

I'm not an expert in the tourism industry but have seen other locations with similar seasonality thrive in the "off peak" by encouraging such things as "theme" weeks or weekends (music, outdoor theatre, eco-tours, leaf peeping tours, environmental lectures or demonstrations, antiques festivals, antique car meets, boat shows, arts and crafts tours, Christmas light tours/parades, authors' lectures, Chataqua-type lectures, etc.). A half-dozen such "themes" promoted by the Township and using, where possible, Township assets like community centres, arenas and parks for events, lectures, etc., could engage local businesses to stay open and participate in the economic activity and would go a long way to fill the off- season calendar. Think of something like the Cranberry Festival every other weekend during the off-season.

d. Would you encourage employers to pay a living wage for Muskoka and the area?

It's an important part of my plan for Community Development (www.peterkelley.ca) that we create the opportunity for local residents to work and live here and afford to own a home, if they so chose, and perhaps to raise children who also see the opportunity to remain in the community as well. Paying a living wage is fundamental to that opportunity.

e. The draft Official Plan doesn't say much about off water planning. Shouldn't our large off water area be part of an overall plan for the Township? Your thoughts please?

I actually disagree with the statement that the draft OP doesn't say much about off-water planning. This draft plan has been through several iterations with plenty of opportunity for public input and as far as I'm concerned addresses the off-water planning issues completely and appropriately.

Questions Specific to a single Mayoral candidate

PETER KELLEY: As the head of the economic development committee, what initiatives did you get completed?

The Economic Development Committee accomplished quite a bit, in my opinion: we completed long-overdue foundational elements like an existing-business inventory, a business welcome package, an annual business survey, Community Improvement Plans for Bala and Port Carling. We made progress in getting broadband delivered across the Township. We created a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Chamber of Commerce, new way-finding signage for the downtown retail areas and for several trails. We piloted the successful Lock Street Pedestrian area. Importantly, we developed a COVID Economic Response program to allow retailers/restaurants to quickly respond to changing COVID restrictions. Much of this work establishes a base for the EcDev Committee and Council efforts in the future and I'm sure there would have been more progress but for the challenges that COVID brought to all.

(Responses from Peter Kelley and all Responses end)