

Meet your Ward C Candidates who may potentially serve you for the next four years

Guy Burry, Acclaimed, District and Township Councillor, Ward C

Guy Burry is a newcomer to the municipal politics arena and has been acclaimed. He has decided not to provide written responses, stating, "I have decided not to answer the questions. Too much repetition from what I have already written. And I am acclaimed." Councillor Elect Burry did attend the Chamber All Candidates Meeting on September 29

About Responses from Township Councillor Candidates, Ward C

October 8: Please know that we have not yet formatted these responses and you should not hold anything against the candidates for how they are formatted as they have a lot on their plates (and so do we at the Chamber). Responses are listed alphabetically by last name.

Note: While Sandra Morris and Daniel Simmonds will appear on your ballot, they have withdrawn as candidates.

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ROB BOSOMWORTH

1) 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?*

Answer: See answer to 1c

- 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?*

Answer: I support the direction of the current draft OP to require on-site staff housing for new commercial resort waterfront developments.

- 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?*

Answer: Yes I definitely encourage attainable housing in both urban and rural areas. I do not believe the MLA/FOM are against such development.

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

Answer: I believe the most helpful action that will encourage skilled workers to come to Muskoka is expanding the supply of attainable housing. See my response to 1c.

- 2) *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?*

Answer: The new Official Plan is still being developed. I do not know what the current Official Plan says with respect to municipal incentives to build off water 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?*

Answer: This is a hypothetical question as we are not currently in a recession. That said, I do not know enough about the options available to the township to help small businesses during a recession.

- b) *What is your position on development restrictions versus economic vitality?*

Answer: Development and economic vitality are essential to the overall well-being for all who enjoy Muskoka, whether as permanent or seasonal residents. To protect the very essence of Muskoka all property development and especially lake front development must put the environment, lakeshore and tree canopy first.

- 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.*

Answer: I see no reason to delay investigating ride-share services in Muskoka and would encourage it.

- 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?*

Answer: I support some limited recreational use on the main floor of a boathouse. This should be limited to activities that would normally be done on the dock such as lounging. The main reason for limiting activities to recreational uses is to limit the amount of noise, light, parties etc. Noise at water level travels very far, as does light. Neighbouring docks / boathouses are often only 200 feet away.

- 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?*

Answer: The township is planning on implementing a mandatory septic bed inspection bylaw and I support this initiative.

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

Answer: We need more attainable housing in both urban and rural areas. I agree with the proposal in the draft OP that requires resort development to have on-site staff housing.

- 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?*

Answer: Short-term rentals have become an essential element in the economy of Muskoka. They bring people who want to vacation and have money to spend. That said, I support licensing of short-term rentals to give the township leverage to stop unwanted behaviour. For the most part I believe short-term rentals are mainly at waterfront properties which are not normally associated with affordable/attainable housing. We need to have more housing built and I support affordable/attainable housing in both urban and rural areas.

- 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?

Answer: I would support allowing cannabis sales in the Township. Cannabis is widely available across the province, there is no reason to not have it in the Township.

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

Answer: I am afraid I do not have enough insight into how the departments function at the Township to be able to answer this question

3) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COLLABORATION

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

Answer: I believe that the economy in Muskoka is strong. I have not yet spent enough time to understand how the Township supports economic development and I don't want to give you a motherhood answer. As I have said, economic growth is important to the overall wellbeing of Muskoka.

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?

Answer: I am open to any proposal that the Chamber would put forward. Understanding issues from a business perspective is very important for Council to make good decisions.

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?

Answer: I don't have an answer to this question. Better to ask a current Councillor or call the CAO.

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?

Answer: See answer to 3a

- 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?

Answer: As I said above, maintaining strong communications with the Chamber should be an important objective of Council. At present I do not have any specific suggestions on how to do this, but would welcome input from the Chamber.

- 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 to ensure these bylaws are enforced?*

Answer: I support strong bylaw enforcement. I also strongly believe that bylaws must be clear and easy to understand and easy to enforce effectively.

- 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?*

Answer: Bylaw officers should be available on the weekend and in the evening as required. Also see answer to 3f

4) EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND SEASONALITY

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

Answer: see above answers about attainable housing and on-site housing for resort development.

- 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?

Answer: There are numerous associations active in our Township representing a broad spectrum of residents. Some of them have strong opposing views so the discussions have been heated. We should be thankful for the strong participation of all of these mostly volunteer organizations.

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

Answer: I think increasing tourism in shoulder and winter months is very much worth pursuing. At present I don't have any suggestions but as a long time snowmobiler I know that this would be a good market to encourage more in Muskoka.

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

Answer: Yes

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?

Answer: I am not very familiar with this section of the current OP. As I have said above, I do support attainable development in rural areas. *(Rob Bosomworth responses end)*

MATT FAIRBRASS

HOUSING AND TALENT

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?

Encourage needed investment in housing projects from the private sector. Identify seasonal housing and year-round housing needs. First obtain a true picture of what is really needed and by whom

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?

In regards to staff housing (resorts) they need to provide accommodation. Investigate subsidized housing from large employers who rent year round just to lock up accommodation for the summer months. Leaving the properties vacant during the off season. Encourage smaller out buildings or renovations to private properties that have the services and can be converted.

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 encourage affordable housing in both rural and and urban areas. I am not guided by the MLA or any other group. I am not an MLA minion.

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

Muskoka Lakes needs to reach out to skilled workers via job fairs, online postings and to help local businesses to pursue potential workers with incentive packages and performance guarantees / rewards etc.

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 OP is a land use document. As stated the best lands for affordable housing are identified as urban. The majority of the Op is to do with densities. I suspect that special interest groups have

no desire to see land used for affordable housing. Nor see council time and resources directed towards this endeavour.

DOING BUSINESS IN MUSKOKA LAKES (Conditions for Business and Sector Specific Questions)

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

Tourism is our backbone, we need to attract day trippers as well as longer stay visitors with stay packages and events. Broaden some of the venues and search out what makes people want to get away for a time. Develop more annual events so bookings and numbers can be anticipated. I don't have a crystal ball Nobody can be held accountable for successes or failure...silly question in my opinion.

What is your position on development restrictions versus economic vitality?

Development restrictions are a must, you can have economic vitality without overly ambitious development. We need growth but growth comes in many forms.

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 am all for Uber and the like as long as they are properly licensed and monitored without causing undo costs or aggravation to our towns with issues that may arise.

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?

Boathouse lower levels are for boats not accommodation. I support the upper level to be used for living in. Sewage and services are problematic over water as it is. Flooding is always a possibility and insuring a structure for this use be it tenant or owner will be problematic.

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?

I support mandatory monitoring. If no records can be found on file then a fee should be levied to inspect the systems at the owners cost. If issues are found then a mandatory repair order be issued with a strict time line to comply.

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

These offices are an embarrassment. They have ruined main street in my opinion. I would like to see them turn over a small portion of their space to mini stores with minimum rent if any at all. I would be a kind gesture. New business is not really defined in the question. If it's retail then they generally need main street exposure. If its commercial in nature then we need more

commercial space such as a proper industrial area that can be developed. Staff shortages are a country wide problem and will continue to be so. Lack of skilled and licensed personnel will persist into the future. No easy fix.

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?

Yes, I support this 100% Many homes are rented out during the peak season to both visitors and hotel staff leaving them empty during the remaining months.

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 will never support any sort of legal cannabis sales in Muskoka Lakes period. Our towns are unique and have strong moral values. Drugs are a virus and spread like a disease. I highly doubt that 70% of residence support this type of activity. I would like to see how the question was posed to them. I don't care if the business is legal or not. It goes against my moral beliefs.

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 made it hard for everyone. It chose no sides. Things are getting back to normal now. I appreciate the patience people showed. Lets just be thankful that they were able to do their best. Your councillor in many cases can help with the processes. Its a matter of communication across the board.

2) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COLLABORATION

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

I suggest more all season events where possible. The Cranberry Festival is a huge draw as an example. I want to see new events created and marketed. Every event we have is successful we just need more of them. I want to see careful economic growth. We should be looking at offering relocation services to existing companies that may wish to move to Muskoka for what we have to offer. I support whatever it takes to pursue this potential.

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 want to see full collaboration with the chamber of course, they are the eyes and ears of business and tourism. Council should always consider inputs from the chamber as they have productive and viable dialogue. It is vital that business opportunities are not missed or passed over. I fully encourage funding from council should a project or event warrant it.

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?

Not sure there really is a problem. It depends on the business and what they require for land use, transportation routes, proximity to markets etc. I would assume that large businesses would contact Bracebridge and begin dialogue there. I would also assume that a business has already formulated what they need its just a matter of seeking out the best fit through the chambers of commerce.

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 am not versed in what is in place at the moment however any framework that is in place will always be a challenged with uncertainties such as employment issues and a looming recession that keeps moving the target. As I stated earlier we still have huge potential to encourage business to relocate here. Especially with more people working from home and seeking an alternate lifestyle Muskoka has an enormous attraction.

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?

I think at least two councillors should sit on the Chamber Board to provide non bias and transparency. Get the right individuals that have conviction and commitment.

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?

I understand that there is an officer available at all times according to Mayor Harding. However this is a job that may be part of a councillors duties. Locating the offender and filing proper reports will make officers jobs easier. In speaking with residents often times the location / address of the offender is unknown. The complainant has no idea what the offenders address is and provides the wrong information or a vague description. However tough bylaws on behaviour and repeat offenders must be dealt with swiftly and firmly. Gravenhurst already has

rolled out an excellent code of conduct and working fine structure for bad players such as shorts term rentals. Lets look at what they are doing to maintain consistency across Muskoka.

2) Equal Opportunity and Seasonality

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

Businesses should have incentive programs that will both attract and keep staff in place. A signing bonus perhaps and or an end of contract bonus as an example. Perhaps a certificate program where you earn credits in the field your employed in that may be a take away for a career minded individual. House the staff on site if possible as it was in past years.

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?

I agree it an abuse of power completely. These organizations are a wolf in sheep's clothing and dangerous to our democratic system. Is it a matter of who wields the biggest stick wins?. Fear mongering and interfering with council elections paints a biased picture. We don't need to be told what we need to do. We know what is needed and by endorsing any one candidate to pursue their agenda is wrong. To me any endorsed candidate appears to me as a minion of the organization. I would like to see a councillor or mayoral candidate decline an endorsement for once.

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

Increasing tourism in the shoulder season is difficult as so many businesses rely on staff. The school year obviously dictates the availability of many employable people however diverse annual events should be explored. Friendly competitions that can be indoor or outdoor such as food, film, car shows, vehicle rally's, the list is endless. Canvas the local talent and let them lead the charge. There are large clubs in Ontario that just need a nudge in many cases to come and visit. Destination day trips are still very big or weekend stays with an event in mind can bring in substantial dollars as we all know.

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

That is an awkward question. A living wage (whatever that amount may be) must be based on skill sets and on an individual's abilities in a field where there is demand. This is dangerous territory, you cannot force or even suggest that a living wage be paid just because a business is short staffed (to attract employees) or requires a low skill set that simply does no warrant a big paycheck. I am seeing many individuals who are not licensed or properly trained entering the workforce but being paid handsome sums because of severe shortages. The Ontario College of Trades is the overseer of trades and licensing. It is the law that apprentices be registered and follow through their courses to acquire their licenses. In many skilled fields excellent wages are

paid during apprenticeship and after completion.

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?

The OP is nearly finished and is a complex document indeed. I am not fully versed on the document I admit, however as a land use document it should contain aspects off the water of course, especially as more lands are being opened up for residential use and commercial operations. If data is missing or there are grey areas then it should be addressed before any conflicts arise or loopholes become apparent. Powerful individuals and organizations can divide and conquer if documents are lacking in any way. We do not have the financial resources to defend an error or misrepresentation with an incomplete document.

(Matt Fairbrass responses end)

SALLY MOYER KENT

3) HOUSING & TALENT

- e) 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?

I do believe that the problem of finding permanent affordable housing and seasonal housing for temporary workers is the most critical issue facing the Township. This housing shortfall in our Township mirrors similar issues across Ontario and many locations across Canada. Practically, however, affordable housing, is the defining issue of the District of Muskoka and the Province of Ontario, not that of the Township of Muskoka.

Although there are identified development hubs in Bala and Port Carling (on town water and sewage) I believe affordable housing should not be built in isolated locations, away from taxpayer funded community resources in the District of Muskoka. Affordable housing should be located close to community and resources, where housing density is appropriate (more likely in Bracebridge, Gravenhurst areas)

Despite the commute from town to job site, most people want and need to be close to schools, medical facilities and community centers. I do believe that building affordable housing (that should be rented long term, like 20 yrs.) should be a District/Provincial priority, allowing families the security of a home and an ability to bring up a family with stability.

The Township (and the Economic Development Committee) working with the seasonal and local Community must work to find creative solutions. Although the Township owns land which might work for development, it is not in the Development nodes. The Township needs to pair land grants with wealthy developers and Ontario/grants to build subsidized housing at a reasonable cost.

f) 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?

As I am not yet a Councillor, I cannot comment on the Council workings overall. I am personally committed to working with the other members of Council to find creative solutions that work for the District and the Community overall.

g) 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/Friends of Muskoka that appear to be against such development in your decision making?

I do not believe the MLA or the Friends of Muskoka are against addressing the affordable housing problem in the Township.

Despite the commute from town to job site, most people want and need to be close to schools, medical facilities and community centers. Affordable housing should not be built in isolated locations, away from taxpayer funded resources in the District of Muskoka, but built close to community and resources where density is appropriate, more likely in the Gravenhurst and Bracebridge areas.

The issue of transportation is tied to the issue of affordable housing. The Township must collaborate with the District and Province to create a transport plan that works with the affordable housing plan.

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

I would have to understand more fully the types of programs that are in place at the Township and District level currently. I believe that the Township should work with local businesses to establish Training Centres/Education Programs for skilled trades in the construction business (e.g., for certification of electricians, plumbers, engine mechanics, etc.).

- i) 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?

As I am Councillor Candidate, and not a Councillor seeking re-election, I cannot properly comment on what is in and not in the Official Plan.

Doing Business in Muskoka Lakes (Conditions for Business and Sector Specific Questions)

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

I am personally committed to working collaboratively with the other members of Council, the Chamber of Commerce and the District to find creative solutions that work to assist the Community and its businesses in the current economic environment.

k) What is your position on development restrictions versus economic vitality?

I believe that development restrictions will not truly affect the level of construction activity in any material way. Whether a cottager has a 100 or a 250 sq ft hot tub, a downstairs recreational space in a boathouse, or has to limit tree cutting and site blasting, for example, does not mean the development will not happen. It means the development will be completed with an eye for the long-term preservation of the environment and what makes Muskoka, Muskoka. Renovating existing cottages and homes will also generate economic growth for the community. Development needs to be done in a responsible way that always puts the environment first and plans for the long term.

l) 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.

Of course, I believe ride share services like Uber should be welcome in the Township. The question is whether they can make a living servicing this community on a year-round basis, not just during the summer months.

m) 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?

I do not support the use of ground floor space for residential use such as bedrooms and recreation space. Boathouse main floors should be for boats, and should be enclosed spaces, not open for the world to see. The space on a boathouse main floor, is very close, if not directly on the waterway and should not have TV's and other entertainment space that is visible to all those passing by. Boathouses should be for boats and other marine equipment, and by-law enforcement officers need to do proper follow-up on new builds to insure that drydock space is not created from an open slip after the building is completed and approved.

n) 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?

There is currently a Muskoka Lakes Septic Inspection Program in place. This program rates septic systems by risk profile and staff (summer staff included) have been building this database for some time. Initial data has been presented to council from three of nine Wards in the Township. This program needs more resources.

I also believe that before a sale or purchase of a property that has a Septic system is completed, a Septic inspection and any remediation work, if required, must be completed.

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

I do not understand the question as posed.

- o) 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?

I do not believe the lack of affordable housing is tied to short term rentals.

I do not support a 30 - day minimum stay for short term rentals. Renting family held cottages for a few weeks in the summer months often allow families to earn enough money to pay for many of the expenses that are required to sustain the cottage each year. The income from rentals in many cases help families keep cottages in the family by making the carrying costs manageable.

I do believe that rentals for very short- term period, such as less than one week, are the primary problem area and need to be controlled in some manner. In many cases, it is not the rental that is the problem, but the associated noise, garbage, fireworks, etc. We need to increase the enforcement of the bylaws and make access to enforcement easier, such as with a 24- hour, 1-800 complaint line.

p) 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 would allow legal cannabis stores in the Township of Muskoka Lakes. There is enough evidence throughout Ontario that these stores can be introduced without problems.

q) 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?

Since I am not yet a Councillor, I am not familiar with the detailed Township planning efforts, and cannot properly comment.

5) Economic Development and Collaboration

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

As Council is elected for a four-year term, it would be appropriate to have a four-year planning window, not five years.

As a potential new Councillor, I do not have the knowledge or experience to answer this question fairly. I do however believe that the Township and District need to invest in quality broadband, seasonal housing, and permanent affordable housing and a Township/District transportation system in order properly support future economic growth.

- i) 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?

As a potential new Councillor, I do not have the knowledge or experience to answer this question fairly.

- j) 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?

As a potential new Councillor, I do not have the knowledge or experience to answer this question fairly.

- k) 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?

As a potential new Councillor, I do not have the knowledge or experience to answer this question fairly.

- l) 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?

I cannot comment properly on this as I am a new Candidate for Council, with no day-to-day experience with this matter. I would suggest that to ensure proper governance, Council members should not be on the Board of the Chamber, but rather attend all Chamber meetings in an advisory capacity. This would help eliminate perceived conflicts of interest and many recusals when Chamber issues are brought to council. Vice versa, Chamber members could attend all Council meetings, again in an advisory capacity only.

- m) 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?

By-law enforcement is the most important area of concern for me. There are two buckets of by-laws. General by-laws relating to the OPP, traffic, tickets, campaigns, noise, fireworks, etc., and those related to construction and development. There need to be different by-law officers for those of Construction monitoring and those for other by-law management areas (more like policing).

As it relates to construction bylaws, my biggest concern is on project management. Officers need to more tightly monitor projects conformity to a site plan during construction and at the time a building permit is released. In addition, I believe that Site Plans need to allow for multiple site reviews after completion (maybe 6 months, 1 year and 5 years), to insure what was to be built, and the function of those spaces remain true to the plan. [Meaning for example, a 2,500 sq ft storage shed on a site plan cannot become "staff accommodations" or "a pool house/athletic facility", all requiring water and septic. Boat slips cannot be filled-in post permit release and become ground floor accommodation].

As Councillor, I will do my best to find the funding (by deeply delving into the budgets and plans and tax usage) to properly staff the Bylaw enforcement team with qualified construction and planning personnel and the required tools (such as boats, snowmobiles, drones, etc.) to do their job effectively. Construction by-law management must be a proactive effort, not merely a reactive response to complaints.

- n) While The township has gone from one by-law 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 increase the enforcement of the by-laws on weekends and make access to enforcement easier, such as with a 24- hour, 1-800 complaint line. As a potential new Councillor, I am not familiar enough with the issue to suggest additional solutions at this point in time.

6) Equal Opportunity and Seasonality

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

The biggest challenge is finding temporary seasonal housing for summer staff. Without the housing being tied to the employment, there is not viable way to hire transitory summer employees. Large employers, such as Muskoka Lakes Golf and Country club, The Marriott, etc. need to build and maintain their own staff housing. This must be a requirement of any new developments going forward.

- g) 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?

In all Democratic elections, associations, organizations and individuals are allowed to endorse candidates as they see fit. Endorsing candidates that represent their interests is not an abuse of power... this is how Democracy works!

It is the Candidates responsibility to ensure that they work to represent the interests of ALL of their constituents fairly, once elected.

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

This is a very challenging area that has no easy solutions.

In order to grow winter tourism, I would suggest the development of Eco-tourism projects. Although there is an advanced and highly utilized snow mobile trail network in Muskoka, there is very little for avid cross-country skiers and snowshoers. I believe that in order to get the cottage community to “come to Muskoka” more in the winter months, the Township needs a high quality cross country and Snowshoe trail network and a high quality Clubhouse to service the users. In the summer and shoulder months, these trails can be utilized as mountain bike trails, in combination with the snow mobile network. (imagine Hardwood Hills North of Barrie with a nicer base lodge area). Some of these trails might be connected with the golf courses that are already in existence (MLGCC, Port Carling).

- i) Would you encourage employers to pay a living wage for Muskoka and the area? Yes, I would encourage employers to pay a living wage, however a “living wage” needs to be clearly defined. It may not be possible for small employers to make ends meet, if wages are pushed too high either by an external requirement or due to competitive price pressure to hire the limited staff that are available.

- j) 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?

No comment on this as I am not yet a Councillor and am not overly familiar with the official Plan draft.

(Responses from Sally Moyer Kent end)

JASON SIFFT

4) 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? We need further support from the district to re-evaluate our township services to connect more areas with sewer and water access. I would also suggest that council be open minded to revised zoning to allow for structured development to address this issue head on. Port Carling, a main hub, has little capacity left in its aging sewage treatment plant and needs to be upgraded. We should relax zoning restrictions on off water property to be able to create more building lots on individual septic's.

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? I believe that currently there is a disconnect from the council members and the residents. Not only are issues not being addressed in ways that cater to the residents they are not focusing on issues that greatly affect everyone, such staffing shortages and housing availability. You are correct in saying there has been focus on the waterfront properties and that has stemmed from a knee-jerk reaction to recent complaints. I feel council needs to operate with more input from the public to focus priority on matters that are important to all local residents.

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 feel affordable housing is a major issue in both our rural and urban centers. We need to be able to offer housing to existing residents, prospective residents, and workers as well as future generations. Currently, there is no where to go, forcing people to look elsewhere for housing and work. Nobody wants to see our area overrun or completely suburbanized. But there is a healthy balance that will appeal to new generations and welcome residents to support our community year-round.

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

As a local business owner I feel the same constraints that many businesses here do in acquiring and retaining staff. We as a community fall short in being able to recruit from outside the area as there is no available options for relocation. With a focus on affordable housing options, we would be able to promote businesses on a wider scale to welcome skilled workers and staff, and in turn have the capacity to better serve our customers and our community.

- 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?

Some directives for attainable housing has been proposed in the new OP, but there are no concrete incentives. What the plan does include is more restrictions, more red tape and more hoops for residents and developers to jump through to achieve this goal of increased housing options. There are many factors involved in achieving affordable housing and I believe it begins with getting support from the district to strengthen town services and addressing zoning. Some incentives we should be looking at are reductions or deferrals of development charges, along with other tax breaks. Currently, they are not there because the current council has been too focused on waterfront properties. This is one reason I am running, more focus needs to be on our year round resident's issues.

DOING BUSINESS IN MUSKOKA LAKES (Conditions for Business and Sector Specific Questions)

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

Our largest economy in Muskoka Lakes is our building industry. Increasing the red tape and slowing down the development process while entering a recession is short sighted on councils part. This is exactly what the draft OP will do. During recessionary times we need to be very cautious that we are not putting up barriers or adding expensive processes. Creative solutions will be needed to help encourage businesses to thrive and expand into year-round economic gain, not just seasonal.

- s) What is your position on development restrictions versus economic vitality?

These are both complex issues that are closely intertwined. More development restrictions could slow Muskoka Lakes economy because the building industry is our largest. This in turn could affect the economic vitality of our year round residents that are already feeling the pressure from rising interest rates and inflations.

- t) 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.

Muskoka lakes should absolutely be taking part in ride share initiatives. Geographically we occupy a large area with dispersed communities. We want to encourage people through the entirety of Muskoka to access all amenities. This is a great way to offer more affordable transportation to residents.

- u) 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?

I think use of the lower level of a boathouse should not be limited to boat storage only. People need space to get out of the weather and also room to store their boats. I feel having a lounge area, a TV, sink, relevant appliances (no cooking), a washroom or sauna should be allowed. Although we need to have some restriction on the use of the lower level of boathouse, I feel the township needs to be careful trying to control how people use their space. Let's focus on what shouldn't be there like bedrooms and ovens and let constituents decide how they want to use the boathouse in conjunction with their boat storage.

- v) 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?

The current council has just completed a mandatory septic inspection program. This singles out any high risk systems and will work to bring them into compliance. This is a highly beneficial initiative that is going to address larger contributors to environmental disturbances. We do need to put more effort into data tracking and proactive action plans should the problem grow or become more frequent.

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

As a local business owner, I feel the same constraints that many businesses here do in acquiring and retaining staff. We as a community fall short in being able to recruit from outside the area as there is no available options for relocation. The other issue at present is the seasonality of our economy. We need more year round residents so that businesses are supported year round and not for just 6 months. Then there would be more stores and less real estate offices. To solve this we need to focus on housing availability.

- x) 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?

We do need some regulations around short term rentals. Do we need a licencing program? I am open to it, but we would need to be creative in implementing to avoid additional cost on the township. I do not support a 30-day minimum as this is not really the culture of cottaging. Yes, some may reside here seasonally, but a lot of cottage owners travel back and forth for weekend use. Forcing a one-month minimum occupancy would make it cost prohibitive for a lot of renters. But I do agree we need to come up with solution so other owners are not affected by the actions of their neighbours or their rental guests. The lake is for everyone to enjoy and if one cottage is wrecking this enjoyment for all in a bay that is simply not fair.

- y) 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 would support legal cannabis sales as per the direction of the Provincial Government. I feel this should not be dealt with at the municipal level. The province has approved it and if people want to engage, it is their choice as residents of Ontario.

- z) 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?

To regain better lead times, the township needs to remove red tape not increase it as proposed in the new Official Plan. As drafted, there will be more steps involved in development which will overfill our current planning office and continue to slow approval processes, exasperating the problem. I have asked the current council on a number of occasions how they will address this and we do not get answers. If we are going to continue down this path of mass restrictions, as the current council, has we will need more staff at the township. Personally, I think we need to look at all restrictions and get more data to see if the new restrictions will actually help solve the problems.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COLLABORATION

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

The 5 year plan should include supporting our year round residents and local economy by addressing the affordable housing issues, access to infrastructure and employment shortages.

- p) 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?

In general as a township we need to establish new ways that our constituents can get involved in the process and the Chamber could be one of these ways. Communication and access to councilors is key. From a council perspective we need to continue to support our chamber with the needed funds.

- q) 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?

There are multiple municipalities, but all of these come under the larger body of the district of Muskoka. This isn't really an issue that can be solved at the municipal level but municipally we could apply pressure for the district to solve this issue. Once you have established what municipality you want to be in you could reach out to them as well. This is also in part why the Chamber is assisted with funding from the municipalities to help support local business.

- r) 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?

Having recently come out of COVID, many policies were effective in ensuring that the business community was not decimated. That was one positive coming out of a truly difficult time. I do not think the proposed policies need to change but we need to prioritize the key factors to ensure business growth and success - the right labor pool, and the ability to deliver affordable services and housing to new workers that are key for business growth. The irony of Muskoka is that demand for goods and services often exceeds the supply. So it is important to address the supply side. Another point that I think would be useful is to look deeper into how to create more 4 season activities and businesses. This will not be easy but clearly is a game changer.

- s) 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?

Communication and collaboration are the best way to improve relations going forward between the council and the chamber. Chamber members are welcome to present to council on a more frequent basis to help council better understand issues that need to be addressed.

The township has also been adding more staff to help with this including a new communications role.

- t) 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 question is directed to the Mayoral Candidates, I will defer to Phil Harding and Peter Kelley.

- u) 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?

First off, we do need more bylaw enforcement, but also we need support from the OPP for after hours. It would be unsafe for our bylaw officers to attempt to go to a party after hours where drinking is involved, they do not have the training to be peacekeepers. A short term rental licensing program would probably be a better way to deal with these issues before the complaint comes in but would also help to educate on what our bylaws are. The issue with bylaw enforcement will always be that the vast majority of the time it deals with issues after they have already happened. The OPP is trained to deal with issues at the time of it happening.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND SEASONALITY

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

One of the biggest hurdles for seasonal staff is access to housing within reasonable distance to the place of work. To solve this again we will need to get more creative with zoning. This could be through allowing more multi residential developments but it could also be by allowing people to have secondary apartments for rent.

- 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?

I do feel that the influence from outside third party advocacies has caused confusion among council this last term. A lobbyist registry would be the perfect solutions to this. If councillors are contacted by a lobby group this should be recorded and shared with all. If there is nothing to hide there should be no harm in having this. Muskoka Lakes did not elect the MLA or FOM to council they elected councillors and councillors should be able to make the hard decisions that need to be made without the fear of reprisal from these outside group controlled by a few people.

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

Our current economy heavily relies on summer tourism, to encourage winter tourism we need to look at what activities we have to offer. Then encourage the public to build businesses around these activities. The Chamber could be a big part of this initiative. Again we need to focus on housing availability to solve this issue.

d) Would you encourage employers to pay a living wage for Muskoka and the area? Yes, I believe employers should all strive to offer living wages, but we as a council need to be able to support businesses to prosper and grow to be able to do this.

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? Yes absolutely!! The current OP is so focused on our waterfront property and does not focus enough on our off water area. The main reason for this is because the current council has kept this as their focus. This needs to change. Our year round residents needs must be addressed and this will be something I would push for if elected.

(Jason Siftt responses end)

SEAN STOKES

5) HOUSING & TALENT

j) 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?

As I understand it there is already considerable debate about whether the Ontario government's goals are achievable given a number of factors including the planning estimates put forward by the province's municipalities, the availability of skilled tradespeople and the general choke points inherent in multi-level government. That said, housing is a cornerstone issue in improving quality of life for Muskoka residents and

building and diversifying a year-round, sustainable economy in the Township. Council needs to ensure zoning allows the appropriate types of housing to be built, to implement new programs to fill existing gaps, to remove bureaucratic barriers and to ensure all programs available through higher levels of government are being effectively utilized to the Township's benefit.

k) 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?

As with housing in general, year-round attainable staff housing availability, not merely for seasonal workers to service cottagers, is fundamental to the evolution of the Township. AT A MINIMUM I believe the issue of local, available, affordable, non-waterfront housing in the Township needs to receive the same level of attention from council as do waterfront properties. The lack of staff accommodation and a viable year-round economy does nothing to benefit the sustainability of the local economy and is detrimental to both year-round and seasonal residents. Ensuring developments are planned, designed and zoned to accommodate year-round attainable housing and getting developers to buy in is crucial. Prioritizing permitting for multi-family rental housing rather than single-family vacation homes could be another strategy. Change is hard, but in the long run, fostering a viable year-round economy is beneficial for ALL Muskoka residents. That the OP has a requirement for resorts that "Staff housing on site shall be a condition of development" is a start, but perhaps this should be bolstered to specify: "Year-round staff housing..."

l) 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?

Further to my comments above, affordable housing in both urban and rural areas is vital to the financial health and growth of the Township. Certain

taxpayers in the Township and the special interest/cottager associations that “represent” them need to look past their own fence lines and self interest to recognize that what is good for the Township is ultimately also in the best interest of seasonal residents. My opinions on special interest/lobby groups are outlined in 4 b).

m) What would you do to help Council and staff bring talent and skilled workers to Muskoka Lakes?

Again, attainable housing is vital. If there is nowhere affordable to live, why come? Without incentives, talent and skilled workers may just as well migrate to or stay in larger centres where housing and quality of life is equally out of reach. Additionally, the Township needs to build its brand as more than a summer destination for the well-heeled but rather as a welcoming community offering a good quality of life, amenities and employment opportunities that are attractive to those looking to relocate. Part of this dovetails with initiatives to develop and sustain a more vibrant year-round economy I discuss elsewhere.

n) 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?

In my reading of the OP, the idea of off-water attainable housing is addressed generally. Historically, the focus of development in communities such as the Township has been single-family waterfront properties that generate significant tax revenue. In the Township, the attention on this sector of housing has been skewed by certain special interest groups and cottager associations with definite agendas that represent some of the loudest voices due to their wealth and power. Not a bad strategy to generate tax revenue, often to some waterfront cottagers' chagrin, but not sustainable due to the lack of attainable housing and a viable year-round economy that will attract workers and grow the economy generally as well as the enhancing the availability of those services

that seasonal-only cottagers demand. This needs to change starting with attainable housing.

7) Doing Business in Muskoka Lakes (Conditions for Business and Sector Specific Questions)

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

The Township needs to recognize, and perhaps it does, the importance and benefits of ensuring that policies and rules are connected to clearly defined growth strategies and goals that drive business development. The Township needs to be creative in its vision and inclusive of a variety of voices and ideas in developing its strategies and policies. Engaging all stakeholders – businesses, year-round residents, seasonal cottagers and tourists to guide strategy is one way to do this. Another part of this is ensuring Council is doing everything it can do to leverage the resources of higher levels of government by using existing and new relationships at the provincial and federal levels to collaborate and influence the deployment of resources to the Township. The ability to influence growth and business development is in Council's hands.

bb) What is your position on development restrictions versus economic vitality? **Development oversight is important in order to preserve and protect what we all value about Muskoka. Even more so in a Township like ours where there are very clear distinctions and divides between certain groups and their particular issues. That said, economic vitality is key to a sustainable community. There needs to be balance but decisions need to be based on data-backed evidence rather than pandering to special interest groups and the loudest voice in the room. There is no reason why development restrictions/oversight and economic viability need to be mutually exclusive.**

cc) 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.

As I understand it from the Chamber's recent discussion with the Mayoral candidates, Uber has no appetite to set up the Township for economic reasons.

I think a viable ride-sharing service would be a huge benefit to the Township if not only for the obvious reasons that it would create jobs and enhance the safety of all of us by ensuring that residents and visitors have a viable alternative to driving their own vehicles to and from a night on the town or at friends' homes. If a local businessperson wanted to start a ride-sharing program of their own in the Township I would definitely be supportive.

dd) 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 lower floor of boathouses are for boats and related items, in my opinion. With the massive size of many waterfront properties on large land packages with significant amenities there is more than enough space for people to play ping pong and sleep elsewhere. This topic is merely a distraction when there are many more important issues to be dealt with.

ee) 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?

There is no argument against the protection of Muskoka's most precious resources – its waterways, forests and environment. But these important decisions need to be determined by data-backed evidence and financial analysis to make responsible decisions now and for the future. At the same time, more data and rigour are needed to accurately understand zoning issues around development.

A working committee should be formed with appropriate expertise to collect baseline environmental data -- water quality, e coli, algae blooms, invasive species, aquatic and wildlife populations, wetlands, vegetation health -- and a database created with regular updates. This will assist in evidence-based decision-making, as well as tracking and measuring the impacts of bylaw implementation/adjustment. A viable, cost-effective and current system for tracking old and new septic systems and violations should be implemented and maintained by the Township and not downloaded to taxpayers. All of this evidence should be made accessible to all.

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

Please also see my responses elsewhere.

Affordable housing is a key issue. Without affordable, attainable housing, we cannot support sustainable year-round businesses to diversify Muskoka's economy. I would undertake an evaluation of documentation of existing properties and development and examine the zoning regulations to identify barriers and under-utilized areas for multiple family units – urban and commercial-zoned locations, for example. In addition, I would like to better understand what federal and provincial government tools the Township is using/able to access to assist with the development of affordable and attainable housing and government programs designed to incent and support business development.

gg) 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?

I believe in greater access for all to Muskoka. Because of the shortage of alternatives for visitors to the area, short-term rentals have a place. But there must be rules to govern behaviour and management of short-term rentals, which I understand are currently in the works. I can support a fee-based registry and payments by owners of short-term rental units. Rules need to be properly drafted, implemented and enforced and owners need to be held accountable in a significant way for breaches. If a property is effectively a business, and not a residence, then appropriate zoning must be adhered to, and charges imposed so the township/district can offset some of its costs - eg enforcement, fire response, water /waste management. In certain municipalities, for example, property owners must live in their short-term rentals for a reasonable portion of the year to remedy the negative effects of short-term rentals by non-resident owners including the impact on long-term rental supply and on neighbourhoods. As always, the rules must be enforceable, well-communicated and the consequences of breaking rules meaningful.

hh) 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 see no valid reason for Council to prevent a legal business from establishing in the Township and would vote in favour of same.

ii) 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?

The past several years of Covid have been an anomaly. My understanding is that Council has implemented a number of initiatives to improve accessibility of services in unprecedented times. That said, I'm sure service delivery has improved as we have adapted during Covid to this new reality but there is always more that can be looked at and done to learn and improve to the benefit of both businesses and the general public.

8) Economic Development and Collaboration

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

Please also see my responses elsewhere.

Promoting new avenues of business development to diversify Muskoka's economy and nurture year-round business is one of my key issues. We need to sell Muskoka as a year-round destination. We need to be creative in building and diversifying the Township's economy and use all available levers and strategies at our disposal. For example, the recent film production, which the Chamber played a large role in, is a perfect example of a sector that needs to be courted. Council should leverage its relationships with the province to lobby the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund to expand its boundaries to include Muskoka so that businesses in this region can capitalize on economic development and job creation programs targeting the film and other sectors. As a reminder, this is merely one example.

w) 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?

The Chamber is a key partner in the overall economic development in the Township. As such, there should be an active working relationship between the Council and the Township. Clearly, as shown in question e) below, there are fundamental structural issues in the way that relationship has operated. Having not been on council I don't have full details on how the economic development arm of the Township operates and cooperates, however based on comments I have heard, including from Mayor Harding at the Chamber's recent meeting, changes are needed with regard to the economic development committee going forward. Also see e) below

x) 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?

The municipalities need to communicate and work together to jointly promote business development in the Township, if they are not doing so already. It seems to me that District Council should be empowered to promote the District of Muskoka as a whole. The various Chambers can also play a role in this. Let's

also not forget that in business, competition is a good thing. It keeps organizations nimble, incents excellence, fosters innovation and stimulates growth. At the base level, the Township of Muskoka Lakes should operate more along the lines of a business and market itself as Muskoka's premier business destination.

y) 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 believe I have answered this previously, however, any economic development program needs to be focused, collaborative, open to new ideas and driven by clearly defined growth strategies and goals. We have an incredible amount of business experience here in Muskoka Lakes - let's work together to focus on operating the Township as a business as best we can.

z) 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?

Another key part of my platform is that transparent governance and fiscally responsible leadership with real-world experience in finding solutions to hard problems is crucial – I believe I bring this to the table. The Chamber and municipal government are two distinct organizations and if it is felt necessary from a governance perspective that councillors must recuse then clearly a review and overhaul of how the relationship between the two entities is managed is needed. There are many other ways to facilitate communication than having an elected official sit on the Chamber's board or interacting in a way where recusal is required.

aa) 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?

While not running for Mayor, I agree that bylaws need to be enforced and enforceable. Loopholes must be closed and those breaking bylaws must be held accountable in a meaningful way. I will do everything I can to ensure plans and bylaws are evidence-based and drafted in plain language that can be understood by all. One simple idea, if not already enacted, is to look at the sharing of enforcement resources across jurisdictional borders. But this is only one.

bb) 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?

The Township does have a by-law enforcement policy - C-PS-04 – Municipal Law Enforcement Policy and Procedure Manual. Perhaps a first step is a hard look at this to see what changes might be made. The enforcement policy provides a number of options once a bylaw contravention has been identified: educational approach and verbal caution, written notice of non-compliance or notice of contravention, written order to comply, order to remedy or stop work order, issuance of offence notices, etc. Perhaps these approaches are too broad and should be reviewed or perhaps sharing of enforcement resources, as noted above, is a means to enhance the system.

9) Equal Opportunity and Seasonality

k) How would you improve the staff situation for summer businesses that rely on seasonal staff?

As noted elsewhere, accessible staff housing and improved business development strategies could go a long way.

l) 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?

Balanced, independent, local representation, with no hidden agendas, that embraces a variety of voices to help find creative solutions is a key part of my platform. In my opinion, it is very disappointing to see special interest groups and cottager associations taking such an overbearing and partisan role in this election. At best, this is an overreach; at worst, a circumvention of the democratic process. This type of involvement is only serving their members, not the overall Township, and the process used to determine the candidates they endorse is ham-handed, seemingly random and potentially pre-determined. Providing opportunities to present candidates and allowing the electorate to make up their own mind, which is the approach taken by the Chamber of Commerce and the Muskoka Ratepayers, is more appropriate. The simple fact that the constituents of special interest groups and cottager associations, which essentially represent lakefront-property owners on the three big lakes, need to ask who they should vote for rather than doing their own research and coming to their own voting decisions is indicative of their level of interest in the greater good of the community. I believe it is important that your Councillors are year-round residents of the township and free of third-party pressures or alignment. Municipal politics has the most direct, day-to-day impact on you and your family. The most important thing you can do is get out and vote for what you believe in. Who you vote for should be entirely up to you.

m) What would you do to increase tourism in the shoulder and winter months in Muskoka Lakes?

Creativity, creativity, creativity. Two great examples are the Muskoka Lakes Farm & Winery and the Muskoka Beer Spa. Council can assist with expanding creativity by helping to sell Muskoka as a year-round destination and taking advantage of all available provincial and federal programs.

n) Would you encourage employers to pay a living wage for Muskoka and the area? **I am not sure how you attract staff and grow businesses without paying a living wage.**

o) 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 believe this is addressed to a degree in the Official Plan and I discussed this earlier in 1 e). While the lakes are arguably the key drawing card in our Township, the Township is much more than that. This plays into getting innovative in attracting businesses and creatively marketing Muskoka as more than just a summer vacation spot, but rather a year-round destination to live, work, play and enjoy a great quality of life.

(Sean Stokes Responses and All Responses end)