

Minett Joint Policy Review Steering Committee

ADDENDUM #1:

Summary of Key Findings and Implications

“Boat Impact Assessment – Wallace Bay” by Riverstone Environmental Solutions Inc.

Timeline

- August 2019 Study undertaken by Riverstone Environmental Solutions Inc.
- 20 September 2019 Preliminary findings presented to MJPRSC
- 18 March 2020 Preliminary written draft received by MJPRSC
- 15 April 2020 Feedback meeting with MJPRSC/Riverstone
- 3 June 2020 Final report received

Background

The Minett Joint Policy Review Steering Committee (MJPRSC) was formed in October 2018 and assigned the mandate of providing evidence-based policy recommendations to the Councils of the District of Muskoka and the Township of Muskoka Lakes for determining appropriate planning policy for Minett. As part of its mandate and to further inform its recommendations, the MJPRSC commissioned two independent studies, one of which is “Boat Impact Assessment – Wallace Bay”. This Addendum serves to summarize the study’s key findings and their implications for planning policy in Minett.

Objectives, Approach and Methodology

The project requirements included the following:

- i. Boating usage/activity in Wallace Bay and surrounding area during key summer weekends;
- ii. The measurement of recreational boat traffic at specified destination points accessed by boat from Wallace Bay, such as Port Sandfield and Joseph River, to develop a baseline from which to measure changes in future use;
- iii. Predicting future boat traffic in Minett and key destination points under various development scenarios for Minett;
- iv. Provide input and undertake initial analysis of and make recommendations for a broader Recreational Carrying Capacity policy for Minett and Wallace Bay, and
- v. The requirements for boating impact assessments set out in the Township of Muskoka Lakes Official Plan sections B5.29 and F23

For the sake of being able to directly compare its 2019 findings for Wallace Bay with observations taken in 2007 for the MNAL 2008 report commissioned by Ken Fowler Enterprises, Riverstone mirrored the parameters used in the earlier study. This included: observing the same physical areas; conducting observations over a similar range of long-weekend, regular weekend, and weekdays;

using the same “point count” methodology, and; applying the same size boat safety zones for calculating safe boating capacity. In addition, Riverstone carried out a literature review of best practices.

Additionally, while in the field, Riverstone concurrently measured boating activity using a “period count” methodology, which they believe more accurately depicts actual boating activity in an area. This was carried out in order to capture and describe boating activity in the most complete manner possible.

Key Findings and Implications for Minett

The MJPRSC finds that although Riverstone did not fulfill all of its desired requirements, (e.g. items iii and iv of the above list were not addressed), they were able to provide an up to date perspective on boating activity in the areas studied from which a number of important conclusions may be drawn.

1) Boat Traffic has Increased Dramatically Since 2007 and Regularly Exceeds the Safe Boating Capacity of Wallace Bay

Using the same “point count” methodology and safety standards as in 2007, Riverstone found that boating activity had increased by as much as double in 2019 (REI, pg.1). Using the preferred “period count” approach they conclude that boat traffic in Wallace Bay “regularly exceeds the available boating capacity”, as shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1 (REI, Fig.8).

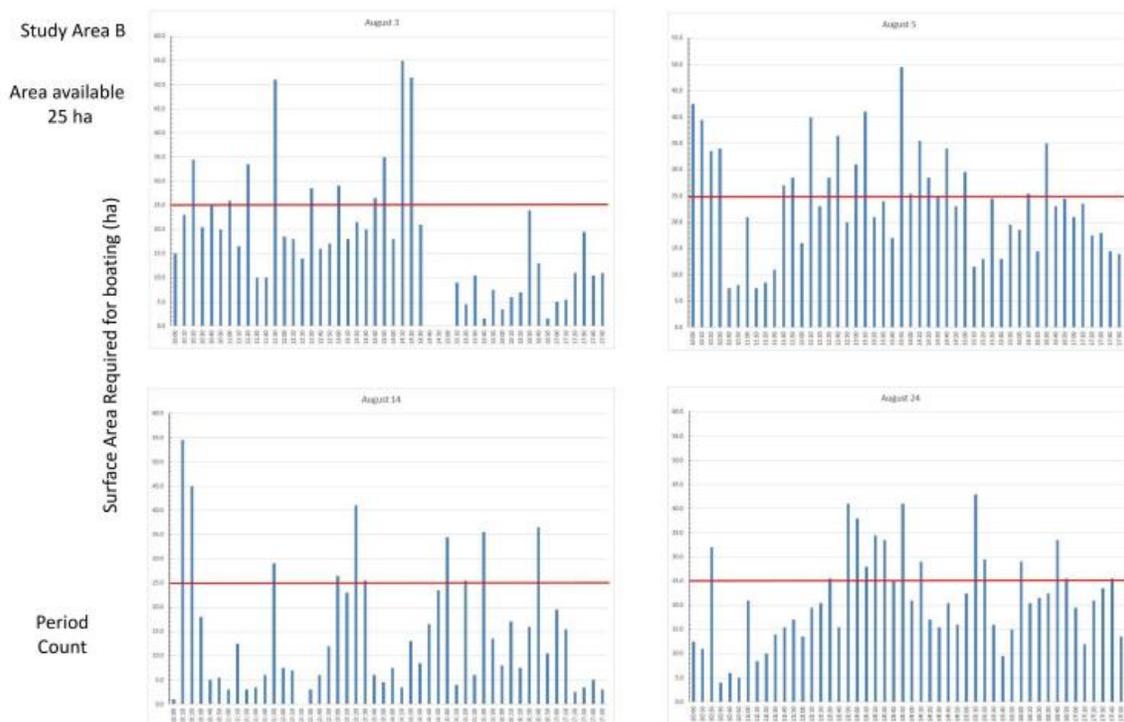


Figure 8. Results of the recreational capacity of Study Area B during each period (Crossing Centre Line).



2) Safety Standards Need to be Updated

Riverstone notes that the most important variable “in assessing boating capacity is the size of safety areas that are applied to a given boat and activity type.” Riverstone found that the sizes of the safety areas used in the MNAL 2008 study “are considerably lower” than those used in comparable studies encountered in Riverstone’s review of available literature. To align its safety areas with those of other jurisdictions, Riverstone recommends that the District increase theirs by “approximately threefold over those used in the Wallace Bay study.” (REI pg. 25)

The MJPRSC concurs with this finding and, although Riverstone did not calculate the impact of tripling safety areas in its current analysis, projects that Wallace Bay would have much more frequently been found to exceed its safe boating capacity.

Riverstone also asserts that “the accepted methodology for completing boating impact assessments... should rely on the use of period counts and not point counts” (REI pg.25) and advocates that the District mandate the use of “period count” methodology for future boating impact assessment studies.

3) Addressing Boating Safety

Having acknowledged that boat traffic regularly exceeds Wallace Bay’s safe capacity, Riverstone proposes three general suggestions for improving boating safety: improving boater education, increasing on-water enforcement, and implementing speed controls.

With regards to the latter, being the only policy-related suggestion, Riverstone acknowledges that the practical application of speed controls “on larger lakes or within a bay is questionable.” They further note that they “were not able to find examples of speed limits in larger open lake areas in Ontario.” (REI pg. 24, 26)

4) Implications for Dockage in Wallace Bay

KFE had received conditional approval for its proposed 582’ dock emanating from the marina location, which would have provided a significant increase in boat docking capacity in Wallace Bay. At the time, boating safety in Wallace Bay was already recognized as a concern based on the findings of the MNAL study. Out of concern that increased dockage could result in increased boat traffic, this approval has remained under a Hold provision pending successful implementation of a 9km/h speed limit within Wallace Bay. Riverstone’s 2019 study has confirmed that boat traffic has increased significantly since 2007, as has the measured frequency of unsafe boating traffic levels.

Therefore, acting out of an abundance of caution, the MJPRSC recommends that any expansion of docking capacity in Wallace Bay be limited to an increase of no more than 20% above the capacity in situ as of the implementation of the Interim Control By-Law, pending further study. Resort experts advise that resorts themselves do not generate significant demand for boat slips, so the Committee further recommends that additional docking be allocated predominantly for day use of facilities and services in Minett.