



Minett Joint Policy Review Steering Committee

Final Report to Township of Muskoka Lakes and District of Muskoka Councils
June 15, 2020

The Minett Joint Policy Review Steering Committee (MJPRSC) was formed in October 2018 following the passing of an Interim Control By-Law on the Minett lands in April of the same year. Its mandate was to provide policy recommendations to District of Muskoka and to the Township of Muskoka Lakes Councils regarding the appropriate nature and scale of development in Minett.

Selected using a rigorous vetting process, the Committee members brought a wide range of expertise to the task and represented a balanced cross-section of Muskoka stakeholders. The Committee worked diligently, meeting regularly over the past 18 months and spending hundreds of hours conferring with experts, researching and analysing relevant subject areas and debating the issues from all angles. To further inform its recommendations, the MJPRSC commissioned two independent studies: “Understanding the Waterfront Economy of Muskoka” and “Boat Impact Assessment of Wallace Bay”.

In January 2020, the MJPRSC delivered its complete set of policy recommendations to Council. Most of the recommendations were concluded with full consensus of the Committee. For the exceptions where consensus was not reached, the majority position has been recommended and the dissenting views articulated.

Although final versions of the two independent studies were still outstanding in January, the MJPRSC was able to derive its evidence-based conclusions from the consultants’ work, Committee members having already been briefed by the consultants on their preliminary findings. Nonetheless, the Committee committed to amending its recommendations as required, should any conclusions of the final studies differ significantly from their preliminary findings. Having now received those final studies, the MJPRSC is pleased to confirm to Council that its recommendations stand essentially unchanged since January. If anything, its recommendations are further reinforced by the final studies.

In a nutshell, the MJPRSC supports and encourages the development or redevelopment of commercial resort activity in Minett, within a well-defined set of guidelines. That said, the Committee unanimously rejects development at the levels and densities initially proposed by KFE and subsequently adopted into the Official Plans and finds that this is NOT recommended for Minett.

Now that the final studies are in hand, the MJPRSC is pleased to submit to Council this Executive Summary of its final recommendations. As a further service to Council, the Committee provides brief summaries of the two consultants’ reports, attached herewith as Addendums 1 & 2. The complete and final set of MJPRSC recommendations is also attached herewith as Schedule A.



The MJPRSC recognizes that the task of crafting appropriate development policy for Minett remains far from over. Among other things, the Committee believes that a clearer definition of the term “unit” as it relates to size (e.g. as measured in sq.ft. or by bedroom count) will go a long way to ensuring that the desired vision for Minett is mutually understood and shared by all stakeholders.

The MJPRSC trusts that all members of both Councils appreciate how much collective effort has been expended by the volunteers of this Committee since they first met to put their collective shoulder to the wheel in October 2018. These dedicated individuals appreciate the opportunity to have served the citizens and Councils of the Township of Muskoka Lakes and the District of Muskoka.

The Committee now entrusts its carefully considered recommendations to you and wishes you every success in doing the right thing in Minett and for Muskoka.

On behalf of the Committee,

James Lewis
Chair, Minett Joint Policy Review Steering Committee



Minett Joint Policy Review Steering Committee

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Executive Summary is intended to highlight the Committee's key findings, the majority of which were arrived at with the full consensus of the Committee. Where full consensus was not reached, the majority recommendation has been recommended and the dissenting views expressed.

As supporting documents to this Executive Summary, a summary of the "Boating Impact Assessment – Wallace Bay" is attached herewith as Addendum 1, and a summary of "Understanding the Waterfront Economy of Muskoka: an Economic Benefits Analysis" is attached herewith as Addendum 2. The complete set of MJPRSC policy recommendations is also attached as Schedule A.

Key Findings:

1. Protect the Environment First, Economic and Social Development Will Follow

Our pristine waters and natural shoreline vistas are what draw visitors to Muskoka and serve as the primary driver of our tourism and waterfront economy. Therefore, protecting Muskoka's environment and the health of our lakes is paramount. This is the number one issue of concern identified in recent TML Official Plan surveys. Furthermore, climate change will have unpredictable and deleterious effects on our lakes, and we must put in place policies now that will protect our lakes for the future.

Accordingly, the MJPRSC has provided a number of recommendations to ensure that our community's environmental objectives are met. Of note: implementation of a Comprehensive Development Plan (or Master Environment and Servicing Plan); inclusion of enforceable phasing provisions; limits to wholesale clearing and major impacts on the landscape of shorelines and slopes; implementation of nutrient plans and tree-protection plans; establishment of natural buffers, and; reasonable limits to grading and blasting, among other concerns. The MJPRSC recommends that the nature and scale of any proposed development should be in keeping with the existing natural and historical character of Minett.

Taken individually and collectively, our recommendations are based on the principle that development in Minett (and across Muskoka) should be evaluated using a more precautionary approach than has historically been the practice, with a view to ensuring that development is



planned and implemented in a manner more sensitive to the natural setting and to mitigating potential environmental impacts.

2. The Designation “Resort Village” is Not Appropriate for Minett

The term “Resort Village” is defined in the Official Plan as a “...planned community, serviced by piped municipal sewer and water facilities...”. Three such Resort Villages currently exist within the District at Taboo, Deerhurst/Hidden Valley and Muskoka Bay.

In its recommendations (page vii), the Waterfront Economy Study’s analysis “does not support the case for a new resort village in Muskoka”. The study projects that over the next 25 years there will be “a need for some 270 net new four-season resort rooms” across the entire District. This incremental demand can already be met more than 5 times over by capacity which is currently approved on existing resort commercial properties. The consultants further recognise that “the supply of additional resort units beyond 270 net new rooms could create a more challenging business environment for resort incumbents and new players”.

On the recommendation of Planning staff, the MJPRSC adopted the term “Special Policy Area” for discussion purposes as a replacement for Resort Village. The Committee does not necessarily advocate adopting “Special Policy Area” as the official designation for Minett, but we are firm in our recommendation that “Resort Village” would be neither appropriate nor accurate as an official designation for Minett. Many locals continue to proudly prefer to refer to Minett as a “Hamlet”.

3. Limit Residential Development to Staff Housing and Single-Family Residential

While the MJPRSC applauds and encourages resort commercial redevelopment, we find that there is no need for hundreds of new homes in Minett, which lacks the schools, hospitals and other services necessary to support a large residential community.

The 2019 Hemson Consulting report projected a need for 22 new seasonal residences and 6 permanent residences per year over the next 30 years within the Township of Muskoka Lakes. There already exists enough vacant and buildable properties/lots, on the waterfront and in currently serviced areas, to satisfy projected demand for seasonal and permanent residences for at least the next 20 years.

Provincial policy requires that residential development be encouraged to take advantage of existing municipal services where possible. District policy requires that multi-residential development be serviced municipally. Considering that nearby Bala and Port Carling both have



ample expansion capacity on their municipal water and wastewater treatment facilities, the MJPRSC recommends against enabling the creation of a new large residential development in Minett.

4. Private Servicing is the Responsible Choice for Minett

When operated properly, privately owned communal services have been shown to perform as well as municipally operated systems. Private systems that are sized to service the commercial needs of a limited geographical area can be considerably less expensive than municipal services. The cost of providing municipal services is prohibitive and should only be considered where extensive development is planned which would warrant the costs of construction and of ongoing operation.

Since there is very little demand for new residential development and an expectation of modest need for new resort rooms, spending millions of ratepayer dollars on building and/or operating new municipal services in Minett is not necessary. As outlined above, there is more than enough untapped residential capacity located in existing, municipally serviced hubs in the Township. The MJPRSC finds that it would be neither cost-effective nor fiscally responsible to build yet another set of under-utilised municipal services at Minett.

5. Density Distribution Should be Guided by Policy

The MJPRSC spent considerable time debating density. While a consensus position was not reached, the majority position of the Committee is reflected in the density recommendations outlined in Appendix A within Schedule A.

The density recommendations are based on the principle that resort commercial activity is encouraged and supported in the waterfront zone, while residential development is not. Accordingly, the Committee has recommended allowing higher-than-residential densities in the waterfront zone provided that these units remain resort commercial in usage.

The Committee also notes that visual impact of development as observed from Wallace Bay is highly relevant to the appropriate distribution of density. It is for this reason that the MJPRSC's density recommendations are zone-based, using (for their familiarity and ease of reference) the physical areas as identified in Schedule J1B of the current Official Plan. While the finer details of density distribution may be relegated to the zoning process, the Committee recommends that it is important to continue to identify these general physical areas at the policy level.

6. Ensure the Ongoing Commercial Use of Resort Units

Insofar as any development in Minett may be proposed on a condominium resort basis, the MJPRSC has articulated a specific set of recommendations to ensure the ongoing commercial use of any condominium resort units. These recommendations, which are located under “Schedule X – Conditions of Use” in Schedule A, were developed working in concert with District and Township planners, and they are consistent with conditions in the condominium agreement at the neighbouring Marriott property.

The MJPRSC recommends that these conditions be adopted into the Official Plan to provide clarity and guidance for future such developments, and to facilitate the creation of relevant zoning and by-laws which will be sufficiently unambiguous and robust to withstand potential future challenges at LPAT.

7. Limit the Expansion of Dock Capacity in Wallace Bay

Based on the 2008 MNAL study, it was recognized at the time that boating safety was already enough of a concern that a Hold was imposed on construction of a major expansion of docking capacity until such time as a 9km/h speed limit could be successfully implemented within Wallace Bay.

The final Boat Impact Assessment received this year concludes that boat traffic has increased significantly since 2008. Even by the standards used in the previous study, boat traffic now exceeds the safe capacity of Wallace Bay twice as often as it did in 2008. The consultant further found that those standards were/are inadequate and recommends that the District require a tripling of the margins of safety used for such studies.

The MJPRSC therefore 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.

8. Use clear and actionable language

The MJPRSC’s recommendations are organised into 23 separate headings, each of which deals with a policy area that the Committee deems necessary for the Official Plan or any amendment thereto. Each of these recommendations is described using language which requires specific action or imposes strict limitations. The Committee consistently chose to use actionable words like “shall” and “must”. Less prescriptive terms such as “may” and “consider” are deliberately avoided, as these lack clarity and leave too much up for interpretation and debate when crafting zoning provisions.