

QUESTIONING MUSKOKA LAKES CANDIDATES:

Leading up to the Oct. 27 election we asked Muskoka Lakes candidates to tell us their thoughts on the above question.

Alice Murphy, Incumbent Mayor

Ongoing economic development growth is expanded when our natural environment is our community's priority one. Annual building activity for Muskoka Lakes totals \$80 million, 51 per cent higher than last year and double neighbouring townships. Ten million dollars plus of additional construction is forecasted from improvements to zoning bylaws.

Sandy Currie

Ward A Township Council

The most critical development project for council next term is shifting our economy towards a year-round economy. Working together, we need to create an innovative strategy/plan that both preserves and utilizes our unique Muskoka environment for future prosperity.

Dianne Davidson

Ward A Township Council

I would hope that a new council could create economic development opportunities in both our construction and hospitality industries with projects such as the Swift River proposal in Bala and the Hanna's Landing in Port Carling.

Matt French

Ward A Township Council

Reliable, fast, high-capacity Internet. It is essential to business today, whether it be telecommuting or locally based. Other townships in our area are hugely out-competing us in this. We are missing out

on attracting, or even maintaining, truly profitable and sustainable development.

Donelda Kruckel

Ward A Township Council, incumbent

Economic development means business. One of the challenges our businesses face is lack of customers during the shoulder seasons. Activities such as hiking, biking, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, curling, skiing and skating bring people to our area. Festivals and activities must be encouraged by council.

Greg Knight

Ward A District Council

Present leadership is forcing the closure of one lane of traffic through Bala for two years and forcing the destruction of Margaret Burgess Park. This is a major threat to economic development. Opportunity exists to work with Swift River to avoid this altogether. We must take advantage of that opportunity.

Ruth-Ellen Nishikawa

Ward A District Council, incumbent

With the passing of TML zoning bylaw of 2014 many opportunities will be available to allow attainable housing within our township. With construction being our primary economic driver employee housing is an obstacle we must overcome by working with open minds and welcome new initiatives and ideas to tackle this obstacle.

Gunta Towsley

Ward B Township Council

Jobs! The township could hire an intern to promote local business through an

awareness campaign to shop and do business locally. Support local retailers, grocery stores, restaurants, farmers, farmer markets, building contractors, garden centres and marinas. All of these businesses provide work and hire staff. It's good for the employer and the employee. Spend your money locally. It helps our economy and provides jobs.

Allen Edwards

Ward B District Council (acclaimed)

The Brock and Willa Wellness Centre will bring over \$9 million of construction work to the Township of Muskoka Lakes as well as new permanent employment. The communities are overwhelmingly in favour of this project and I am committed to see this project completed.

Jean-Ann Baranik

Ward C Township Council, incumbent

I have been a business owner in Port Carling for the past nine years and economic development is close to my heart. I have seen a decline in visitors over the past several years. I would like to identify and promote events. The Township of Muskoka Lakes has great attributes! Creative Muskoka! We need to facilitate opportunities to promote cultural events including visual and performing arts, local initiatives and support our volunteers.

Larrie MacRae

Ward C Township Council

The next most important economic development project before the new council is successfully renegotiating the Bala Falls Hydro Project. Karen McGhee,

SREL's project manager, recently stated, publicly, officially, that SREL is willing to leave Bala's Margaret Burgess Park completely untouched and have two-lane traffic open for construction's approximate 18-month duration.

Jeff Mole

Ward C Township Council

Job creation and growing our local economy is necessary to help build up our community. However, I am wary about governments giving money to companies to create jobs. As the Ward C councillor, I will support/lead development of a community enterprise strategy to create jobs and protect Muskoka character.

Phil Harding

Ward C District Council, incumbent

The reopening of the Port Carling to Bracebridge snowmobile trail. This is a huge economic driver for the Township of Muskoka Lakes, and with the current land owner issues closing the most direct trail, the negative impacts in 2013/2014 winter were significant. It is priority No. 1 for us this coming winter, working alongside the snowmobile club.

At press time, responses had not been received from Don Furniss, candidate mayor, Linda Barrick-Spearn, Ward B township council, Gault McTaggart, Ward B township council, incumbent, W. Ron Brent, current Ward C township council and candidate for Ward C district council, or Terry Ledger, Ward C Township Council.

Furniss says he does not support hydroelectric project

BY BRENT COOPER

Don Furniss is not in favour of the Bala falls hydroelectric project.

"There are candidates in this audience who would have you believe I am a support of the development of the falls, and it is important that I clarify today my position once and for all. Given a choice, not I, not anyone on my team, not anyone in Bala would choose a hydro plant at the Bala Falls. It is a beautiful jewel in the crown of our township, and we would choose to have nothing about it changed."

That statement came from the Ward B councillor and current mayoral candidate during his address at the

Muskoka Ratepayers Association-sponsored all-candidates debate held Saturday morning at the Port Carling Community Centre.

The candidate has been the focus of criticism from the opponents of the proposed power plan project for some time, especially in the past few weeks at the various candidates' meetings. Some residents have questioned Furniss's connection to the project proponents, Swift River Energy Ltd., especially after photos surfaced of him and fellow candidate Gault McTaggart sitting at an area coffee shop with company officials.

However, while he does not back the project, Furniss

said that stopping the project's progression is an entirely different matter.

"The key phrase here is 'given a choice.' The choice here belongs to the provincial government. The choice has been made and it has been challenged and challenged again. From all indications this development is going to happen, and it's going to happen soon. My choice, given the circumstances, is to make sure my people in Muskoka Lakes get the best possible benefit within the scope. But we have to negotiate with the developer. It just makes common sense."

For more on the meeting see muskokaregion.com.



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