



Norman Yan, Chair  
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Jocelyn Deeks, Senior Director and Group Head  
Strategy Corp  
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November 8, 2017

Dear Ms. Deeks:

As chair of the Friends of the Muskoka Watershed, a Muskoka-based, not-for-profit Corporation, I attended one of the meetings intended to solicit public input on Bracebridge's developing strategic plan. I'm pleased to be able to provide you and the town's officers with additional comments, particularly on the second pillar of the plan – environmental sustainability. These comments reflect discussions with several members of our board, all of whom were pleased to have this opportunity to provide input. As requested, I have organized our comments around the questions presented in Mayor Smith's, October 16, Group Submission letter to the community.

As a point of clarification on names, the Friends of the Muskoka Watershed will be transitioning into a new corporation, the Muskoka Freshwater Foundation in 2018. You will see both names used in our commentary.

**Based on your portfolio, what are your priorities for the next 10 years?**

- To establish the Muskoka Freshwater Foundation as a charitable corporation that orchestrates and funds the applied research needed to protect Muskoka lakes from current and anticipated environmental threats.
- To fund, design and construct a Muskoka freshwater research Institute that will attract researchers from around the world to our community and provide direct and ancillary benefits to the town and region.
- To develop a comprehensive real-time monitoring network and database on Muskoka lakes that can be used to evaluate the status and trends of various indicators of water quality reflecting known and emerging environmental threats, including climate change
- To communicate, locally and globally, the knowledge and practices that underpin the management plans needed protect Muskoka's natural environment.
- To establish Muskoka lakes as a standard set of lakes for developing targets for aquatic ecosystem health, using both conventional and emerging techniques.

**In 10 years what do you hope is different about the community? What do you hope stays the same?**

- We hope that the town:
  - is globally recognized as a centre for applied research on freshwater ecosystems

- adopts a philosophy of knowledge generation, creativity and innovation to underpin its decision making
- continues to recognize the central importance of our natural environment to our economic health and culture, but also recognizes the vulnerability of our forests and lakes to anthropogenic stressors of many kinds, including pollutants, climate change, over-harvesting of resources, unrestrained development, and invading species.
- recognizes that we rarely have all the knowledge we need to protect our environment, and thus should adopt a precautionary approach in the evaluation of developments that have a major environmental footprint
- supports efforts to increase our economic and cultural but especially our environmental knowledge
- becomes a key partner in supporting the work of the Muskoka Freshwater Foundation
- creates a position for and employs a “town ecologist” with a mission of evaluating development and planning initiatives to ensure environmental protection.

**Are the four pillars of sustainability in the 2008 Plan still appropriate? Should they be added to or adjusted?**

We believe the four pillars of sustainability (economic, environmental, social and cultural) are fine; however, we do not believe their fundamental underlying hierarchy has been recognized. The figure on page 8 of the draft planning document identifies the central importance of environmental condition, but this central importance is not reflected in the four pillars as they stand. We believe that the environmental sustainability pillar’s importance was not recognized in past strategic plans, but it could be in the new one. After all, half of the jobs in Muskoka depend on a healthy environment, especially the health of our lakes. We recommend that our town’s next strategic plan should recognize the irreplaceability of a healthy environment and adopt policies to ensure that we both protect and wisely manage our environment. We support the strategic objective of having a “green, mindful and environmentally sustainable community”, but don’t believe the 5 stated strategies in the last plan go far enough to satisfy this goal. We suggest that the town should seek to better understand: the current status and trends of environmental condition in the community, the threats to environmental health, and the steps it can take to deal with those threats, while also not impeding the future, greener development of the community nor unwittingly introducing further anthropogenic stressors. As it stands, we do not understand why the 3<sup>rd</sup> strategy (increasing the ratio of permanent to seasonal population) promotes environmental sustainability.

**• In your opinion, what opportunities do you see for Bracebridge?**

We see several opportunities in the town. The acquisition of the Timbermart property and the donation of the property adjacent to the Independent grocer give the town opportunities for visionary development that could improve our environmental knowledge and innovation base. The potential desire of the Dorset Environmental Science Centre to relocate from Dorset promises an opportunity to enrich the knowledge and employment base of the town, if we could convince them to relocate here. The desire of many people in the GTA to relocate or retire to a “simpler” but culturally rich, green community, plus the desire of the ever-changing demographic mix of the GTA to holiday in one of the

world's foremost holiday destinations provide a terrific opportunity, as long as we protect this destination, i.e. our town and its natural environment

**• What are the major challenges currently faced by the Town that can be addressed through the Strategic Plan?**

A major challenge for the town is to foster economic growth while at the same time maintaining, and where necessary improving the overall health of our ecosystems. For this challenge to be faced, we first need to be able to better quantify the capacity of our watersheds to handle more development. We currently have very few tools to make such assessments.

**• What are the key areas that you would measure to determine the success of the Town?**

Measurable evidence of increased global recognition and association of the Town of Bracebridge and, jointly, the District Municipality of Muskoka with exemplary environmental practice as a global leader in contributing to fostering the understanding, choices, actions and wise management necessary to ensure the protection of our freshwater ecosystems.

Should you have any questions about these comments, please don't hesitate to contact me at 705 645-9903. Along with the other board members of the Friends of the Muskoka Watershed, I appreciate the opportunity to provide input on this important developing strategic plan for our town.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N Yan', written in a cursive style.

Norman Yan PhD FRSC  
Chair, Friends of the Muskoka Watershed