

 <b>GRAVENHURST</b> <small>GATEWAY TO MUSKOKA</small>	<b>THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF GRAVENHURST</b>	
	<b>To:</b>	<b>Committee of the Whole</b>
	<b>From:</b>	<b>Glen B. Davies, Chief Administrative Officer</b>
	<b>Date:</b>	<b>December 15, 2020</b>
	<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Muskoka Regional Centre – Update Report No. ADM 2020-11</b>

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Chief Administrative Officer recommends:

**THAT** Report No. ADM 2020-11 re: Muskoka Regional Centre – Update be received for information;

**AND THAT** Administration be directed to continue to collaborate with the District of Muskoka and Infrastructure Ontario (IO) relative to the MRC lands to further the idea of finding the most suitable employment generating redevelopment plan;

**AND THAT** Committee endorses the Mayor and certain Administration to participate in a District MRC Evaluation Committee, which would be tasked with evaluating expressions of interest and providing input in the event that IO provides that opportunity;

**AND THAT** the Town representatives on the Committee include:

- The Mayor
- The Chief Administrative Officer
- The Director of Community Growth & Development

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Muskoka Regional Centre – Update Report is to provide Committee with an update on the status of the Muskoka Regional Centre (MRC) disposition, and to seek more detailed direction to continue efforts in light of recent discussions with the Province, which included their advisory that the lands were officially placed on the open market on Monday, December 7, 2020.

## **BACKGROUND**

Committee may recall that on October 20, 2020, Administration brought a [Report](#) forward seeking direction to continue efforts in finding the most suitable employment generating

redevelopment plan for the Muskoka Regional Center lands. This reporting was done in light of the gap in time since Committee formally discussed the matter, and in anticipation of the lands being placed on the open market in the not too distant future. Since that time, discussions with Infrastructure Ontario (IO) have continued, and the lands have been formally placed on the open market as of December 7. We've been advised that inquiries on the property should now be made to CBRE, who are the real estate firm marketing the property on behalf of IO.

Preceding this most recent direction, and for more historical context, Committee may recall that the Town withdrew from its role of directly negotiating the purchase and transfer of the MRC lands when the discussions with Maple Leaf School and Infrastructure Ontario came to a conclusion in October, 2017. Subsequently, the District of Muskoka, by virtue of a Council Resolution, had entered into the process, and had obtained the right to negotiate acquisition for the past year or so. That timeframe has now elapsed, although the ability for either the District or Town to submit an open market bid on the lands remains available. Notwithstanding all of the above, Town Committee/Council has remained steadfast in its direction to work with the District, IO and other stakeholders to advance the Town's best interests in the disposition of the property.

## **ANALYSIS**

In addition to the above noted discussions with the Province, as directed by Council, ongoing dialogue has also occurred with the District of Muskoka, who recently considered a [Report](#) that detailed their interest in a collaborative approach to redevelopment selection. That consultative approach was previously endorsed by the Premier and the Minister of Government and Consumer Services to find a solution that best met the goals of the Province, Town and District. Given this approach, and notwithstanding a previous contemplation, the District determined that the possible transfer or purchase of the lands was unnecessary. In essence, it was felt that the employment and development goals can be met by the open market, and they preferred this alternative as it limits the risk (both financial and environmental) that would be assumed if the property were purchased by the District.

Very recent discussions with the Province have confirmed that the Town and the District will continue to be collaborators in the process of finding a suitable development for the MRC property. Administration from both the Town and District are continuing to collaborate with the Province and IO with the view to having the greatest degree of influence over the successful bidder/redevelopment plan as possible. Notwithstanding the fact that the land is owned by the Province, and it is their ultimate disposition process/responsibility, they have preliminarily indicated that the Town and District will be afforded the opportunity to evaluate the submissions and provide input into the process. Procedurally then, and in accordance with a recently approved approach through District Council, it is recommended that the Town

participate in a Joint Municipal Evaluation Committee, which would review and evaluate the expressions of interest received by IO in the event that this opportunity is provided. The District Council Resolution confirms that this Committee would be comprised of the District Chair and Mayor and administrative personnel from both the Town and District, as follows:

<b>Elected Officials</b>	<b>Administration</b>
Mayor, Paul Kelly	Glen Davies, CAO Scott Lucas, Director of Community Growth & Development
District Chair, John Klinck	Julie Stevens, CAO, District of Muskoka Samantha Hastings, Commissioner of Community and Planning Services, District of Muskoka

As a reminder, while the Town and District may have some influence on the process and ultimate decision, the disposition process is quite structured, and it's important to understand that decisions are at the Province's sole discretion. The evaluation process for the proposals will not be a public one, and the Committee members noted above will all be required to sign non-disclosure agreements as part of the collaboration process. This agreement would bind members from sharing information that is deemed confidential in nature.

Administration will continue to update Committee, particularly as next steps have been established and timelines provided. While the process detail and Town involvement is not particularly clear at the moment, it is important to remember that the Town has regulatory authority to guide development principles and thereby influence the final results on the property, including the option to impose an Interim Control By-law if/when the time is appropriate.

## **CONSULTATION**

The following individuals / community groups have been consulted over the past year and a half:

- Premier, Doug Ford
- MPP, Norm Miller
- Ministry of Government and Consumer Services
- Manager of Economic Development
- District Municipality of Muskoka
- Infrastructure Ontario

## **CORPORATE FINANCIAL IMPACT**

In the event Committee concurs with the recommended approach, there would be no immediate/direct financial impact. Indirectly, an undetermined amount of administrative time is anticipated that does come at a cost.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

A significant commitment has been made by the municipality to communicate information related to this project over the past several years. It would be fair to expect that this same level of commitment would be continued. Given the inactivity over the past several months (partially driven by COVID-19), there has been very little information to share, although the Mayor has provided intermittent updates in Council/Committee forums.

In the event Committee approves the recommendation to continue collaboration efforts in a more formal manner, the District Municipality of Muskoka and Infrastructure Ontario would be so advised.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Given the history (recent and otherwise), community development interest and regulatory role the Town of Gravenhurst has as it relates to the redevelopment of these lands, it is concluded that efforts to influence Infrastructure Ontario decision making should continue to ensure that the property is developed in a manner that represents the best value to the community. Those efforts would include political and administrative participation on the Joint Municipal Evaluation Committee.

## **RELATION TO STRATEGIC PLAN**

This Report advances and supports the following elements of the Town of Gravenhurst Strategic Plan by:

### **Goal 1: Build Economic & Employment Opportunities**

1A: A more diverse economy with more year-round employment opportunities

This Report specifically relates to expediting the redevelopment of a key property in Town. It is worth noting that during the development of the Strategic Plan, the MRC property was the key example used in establishing this priority.

**RELATION TO OTHER MUNICIPAL REPORTS, PLANS OR APPLICABLE LEGISLATION**

This Report related to other municipal reports, plans or applicable legislation including:

1. Gravenhurst Official Plan
2. Gravenhurst Zoning By-Law
3. Muskoka Regional Centre Optimal Use Study

**ATTACHMENTS - nil**

**RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY:**

Authored by: Scott Lucas, Director of Community Growth & Development  
Approved by: Glen B. Davies, Chief Administrative Officer