

Presentation to District of Muskoka Council

October 31, 2011

Proposed Review of Services

Good evening, Mr. Chair and members of Council. Thank you once again for permitting our representation before you today.

I am appearing on behalf of four Muskoka resident associations; The Muskoka Ratepayer Association, the Georgian Bay Association, The Muskoka Lakes Association, and the Lake of Bays Association. Together our members number over 4000 Muskoka taxpayers.

In the past our Associations have advocated a review of all District programs and functions. We were therefore very pleased to see the Review of Services proposal put forward at the October meeting of the Corporate and Emergency Services Committee (CES). While certain aspects of the proposal have stirred debate throughout the community, our Associations would like to re-state our interest and commitment to the Review of Services however it may evolve.

The issue of greatest concern to our members is the issue of citizen engagement. The original proposal included a Citizen Advisory Committee that would actively participate with Staff and politicians throughout the analysis process through to the decision and implementation stage. However, during the course of the CES debate of the issue this role was revised to what we see as a more limited involvement. We do not support this revision in process and we are here today to request that the role of the Citizen Advisory Committee be re-examined and strengthened.

It is our hope that the people appointed to the Citizen Advisory Committee would come from a broad cross-section of our community. We envisage a group of individuals with varied interest and skills who could become engaged from the beginning of the review process, where the action will be driven primarily by Staff

analysis, through to the decision making stage which must be driven by the political officials. We would expect the members of the Citizen Advisory Committee to be active workers throughout the process.

Most importantly, we believe that the Review of Services will benefit from the different perspectives and experience brought to process by members of the Citizen Advisory Committee. We do not believe that having the opportunity to comment upon proposed changes at the end of the process will provide sufficient opportunity for Citizen contribution to the review process.

District Government is a rather mysterious thing for many of our Citizens. People simply do not know what the District does. They do know however, that District costs a lot of money. It is long past time that District should begin to explain itself to the community.

One of the significant objectives of the Review of Services should be to increase the transparency of District government to the Citizens of Muskoka. We believe that early Citizen involvement in the Review of Services project will be essential to improving the understanding of the District's role

Therefore our request of Council tonight is quite straightforward.

We request that you re-examine the motion that will be before you tonight. We request that you improve that motion to include a stronger, more active, role for the Citizen Advisory Committee. Specifically we suggest that you incorporate Citizen involvement with Staff work groups and with political officials in all phases of this important project.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. That concludes our presentation.