

Motions

Moved by P. Kelley and seconded by R. Maloney

WHEREAS The District Municipality of Muskoka (District) and its residents experienced significant and damaging flooding during the 2026 spring freshet, resulting in extensive impacts to municipal infrastructure, private property, local businesses, roads, the natural environment, and the wellbeing of residents;

AND WHEREAS many residents experienced severe financial hardship, property damage, displacement, loss of access, and ongoing uncertainty associated with elevated water levels and flooding conditions;

AND WHEREAS municipalities within the Muskoka River Watershed have repeatedly raised concerns regarding increasing flood frequency, changing climatic conditions, watershed management practices, and the need for coordinated and transparent flood mitigation planning;

AND WHEREAS in April 2021, the Province of Ontario announced an initial investment of more than \$4 million to support thirteen projects intended to examine existing conditions within the Muskoka River Watershed, identify opportunities to reduce the impacts of flooding, and address the overall health of the watershed;

AND WHEREAS those technical studies and initiatives have since been substantially completed (Flood Modifications Review Project) and provide extensive analysis, data, and recommendations, yet many residents and municipalities remain concerned that the findings have not resulted in meaningful implementation actions or tangible flood mitigation measures;

AND WHEREAS in November 2024, the Ministry of Natural Resources committed in written correspondence, signed by the Honourable Graydon Smith, Minister of Natural Resources, to review and make necessary amendments to the Muskoka River Watershed Management Plan in an effort to better mitigate flood risks throughout the watershed;

AND WHEREAS the District and residents affected by the 2026 flooding continue to seek greater transparency, accountability, and public engagement regarding water management decisions and operational considerations leading up to and during flood events;

AND WHEREAS activation of disaster recovery assistance programs is necessary to ensure comprehensive support for all affected parties within the community;

AND WHEREAS the financial impacts of flooding are not limited to primary residences and significant losses are also experienced by owners of seasonal and second homes that contribute substantially to the provincial economy and local tax base;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Muskoka District Council request the Province of Ontario to take immediate action to:

- Reconfirm its November 2024 commitment to undertake a comprehensive review and update of the Muskoka River Watershed Management Plan;
- Reaffirm its January 2025 commitment to assess recommendations from its Muskoka Watershed Conservation and Management Initiative including updates to the Muskoka River Watershed Management Plan and “a public engagement and consultation process to hear from interested parties in the watershed, including municipal partners and other dam owners.”
- Establish, as a matter of priority, a formal implementation framework for said review and update process, including clearly defined deliverables, publicly reported milestones, firm completion timelines, assigned ministry responsibilities, and regular public progress reporting, so as to ensure the review is commenced immediately, completed in a timely and accountable manner and results in tangible flood mitigation actions and outcomes for affected watershed communities;

- Convene one or more public information sessions within the affected watershed communities, by no later than mid-June 2026, for the purpose of hearing directly from residents impacted by the 2026 flooding event, providing information regarding water management decisions and operational considerations leading up to and during the spring freshet and responding to questions and concerns from affected residents and municipalities, all of which to be on the public record;
- Activate the Disaster Recovery Assistance for Ontarians (DRAO) and Municipal Disaster Recovery Assistance (MDRA) programs for all affected communities arising from the 2026 spring freshet flooding event and expedite the review and approval process to ensure timely access to financial assistance; and
- Amend eligibility criteria under the Disaster Recovery Assistance for Ontarians (DRAO) program to also include seasonal and secondary residential properties in recognition of the unique characteristics and economic realities and benefits of watershed and seasonal municipalities;

AND THAT a copy of this resolution be forwarded to:

The Premier of Ontario, Doug Ford;

The Honourable Minister Harris Jr., Minister of Natural Resources;

The Honourable Minister Flack, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing;

The Honourable Minister McCarthy, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks;

The Honourable Graydon Smith, Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing;

All first nations and municipalities within the Muskoka River Watershed; and

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario.