Brian Ellas:

1. There is room to control spending without cutting roads, fire, water, waste collection, or other core services. Start with non-core and discretionary items: review every grant, study, consultant contract, and “nice-to-have” program against a simple test — does this keep people safe, keep infrastructure from failing, or deliver a service residents actually use every week? The size of District council is one example. A large governing body with overlapping roles between Town and District adds cost and slows decisions. Staffing levels, duplicated functions, and projects that grow beyond original scope also deserve a hard look. I would push for published, plain-language spending reports so residents can see where the money goes before the next levy is set. Essential services stay funded. Everything else has to earn its place.

2. One issue where Huntsville needs to push the District harder is roads and related infrastructure — both the District roads that run through town and the funding formula that decides how much Huntsville taxpayers pay versus what we get back in actual pavement, bridges, and winter maintenance. Huntsville residents see the potholes and the deferred work. The District sets a large share of the tax bill and controls a large share of the capital program. We should insist on clearer priorities, better coordination so Town and District work doesn’t fight each other, and a fairer return for the dollars Huntsville sends to Bracebridge. If the District wants more from this community, it has to deliver more visible results on the roads people drive every day. Childcare is another area. The District should put more pressure on the school boards to open space, expand before- and after-school care, and use existing school buildings more effectively so families are not left waiting for spaces that never materialize.

3. When there isn’t enough money to do everything, safety and asset condition come first. A failing bridge, a road that is a hazard in winter, or a drainage problem that is destroying the base underneath the asphalt gets funded before a lower-priority reconstruction or a project that is more about appearance than function. I would use condition ratings, traffic volume, school and emergency access, and the cost of not fixing something (emergency repairs later cost more) to rank work. I would also look for every available provincial and federal dollar and make sure we are not leaving grant money on the table. Residents should see a published, ranked list so the order of work is not a surprise.