

Leonard Lake – Lake Plan
Stakeholder Survey and
Consultation Report

January 14, 2021

Background and Context

The District Municipality of Muskoka (DMM) and the Township of Muskoka Lakes (TML) has encouraged lake associations to develop Lake Plans and submit them for review and for inclusion of certain polices within the TML Official Plan (OP). Given the broad nature of an OP, a Lake Plan allows the inclusion of lake specific planning policies that reflect the specific needs of the lake. With over 1,600 lakes in Muskoka, it is very difficult for a municipal OP to reflect the needs and individual characteristics of every lake. A Lake Plan is the planning tool that can augment general planning requirements within a municipal OP.

The starting point of the 2020 stakeholder survey and Lake Plan was the 2008 stakeholder survey and Lake Plan. The 2020 survey questions closely aligned with the 2008 survey to gauge changes in stakeholder views with additional areas of inquiry to reflect current issues.

The Leonard Lake Stakeholders Association (LLSA) Board of Directors led the development of the survey and resulting updated Lake Plan on a volunteer basis. While the Lake Plan is a stakeholder plan and not an association plan, any undertaking of this kind requires a central organization to coordinate the activities required to develop and implement a plan, and the LLSA filled this role.

The majority of the Lake Plan was developed by the LLSA. In support of the planning policies that will be submitted to TML for consideration and inclusion in their new OP, LLSA hired a professional planner, Charles Burgess from Burgess Gleason Environmental to assist in these efforts. Subsequent consultation with Leonard Lake property owners and early feedback from the Township of Muskoka Lakes, both noted in the sections to follow, resulted in modification of the policies.

Consultation Process Overview

The overall stakeholder survey and consultation process had four overarching goals:

- Identify a broad group that represents Lake stakeholders,
- Solicit feedback, opinions and comments from the group on a broad range of issues and topics that would form the basis for Lake Plan initiatives and policies,
- Develop a Lake Plan that reflects those initiatives and policies supported by a majority of the members of the stakeholder group, and
- The process must be open, treat all stakeholders equally and be transparent.

The LLSA led the survey and plan consultation process but the outreach and makeup of the stakeholder group went beyond LLSA membership. To identify a complete and exhaustive list of all potential stakeholders, a Lake Plan representative manually went through municipal records on March 13, 2020 to identify all waterfront, backlot and surrounding property owners. In total, 161 distinct waterfront, island and backlot property owners were identified. Note that some property owners own more than one property.

From the list of 161 property owners, a stakeholder list of approximately 248 individuals was compiled who were initially notified of the Lake Plan process by email, if available, and otherwise by regular post with a request for an email address to obtain updates and relevant information. For survey analysis and

Lake Plan voting purposes, the 161 distinct property owners formed the eligible “voter pool”. Given Covid-19 the preferred/necessary method of communication was email.

The development of the Lake Plan was a two-stage process. The first stage was a comprehensive survey on a wide variety of topics to hear what is important to Lake stakeholders. The survey results were summarized and communicated back to stakeholders. The survey results then formed the basis for stage two of the process, that is, the development of the Lake Plan initiatives and policies. Details of the survey and Lake Plan development and consultations can be found in the relevant sections below.

With any public survey or consultation process, stakeholders cannot be compelled to participate. It is their right to either engage and be heard or be silent. LLSA went to significant effort to ensure all stakeholders had the opportunity to participate and outlined clearly in its communications the process to become involved and have their voice heard. All survey information and results and the full draft Lake Plan were publicly posted at www.leonardlake.net for review and/or download. All stakeholders were notified when postings were made to the website.

With all public consultation processes, the mandate is to reflect the majority which typically requires a level of compromise by all stakeholders. Although some felt the Lake Plan initiatives and policies were not strong enough, some felt they were too strong. The final Lake Plan was endorsed by a strong majority of stakeholders who chose to participate, and the plan balances the diversity of stakeholder views.

While the Lake Plan was supported by a strong majority of stakeholders who participated in the process, there were a small number of stakeholders that had strong views against some parts of the plan. Some of those stakeholders participated in the consultations and voiced their views; others did not, but emailed their concerns to LLSA. All comments for and against were heard and considered by stakeholders who participated on the calls. Emails were addressed to those who chose not to formally participate. Stakeholder feedback and comments that had strong support led to some policy modifications, including clearer language.

It is important to note that many of the comments/concerns related to the Lake Plan policies were in fact comments/concerns about the perceived strict nature of certain policies that are already in the TML OP. As a result, the Lake Plan has no ability to lessen the scope of those areas of planning that are the jurisdiction of TML, for example, the TML policies governing variances and grandfathering. One benefit of this Lake Plan exercise has been improved stakeholder awareness of how the planning process functions at the municipal level.

Stakeholder Survey

The initial content and areas of inquiry of the 2020 stakeholder survey came from the 2008 stakeholder survey. Next, the survey took into account the general areas of interest and topics that were raised by stakeholders in recent LLSA annual general meetings and other stakeholder received feedback. Issues that had strong stakeholder interest were:

- Water quality and Lake health - triggered in particular by the 2018 Blue Green algae bloom and the spring 2020 golden brown algae bloom on the Lake,
- New lot creation/lake capacity,

- Boating,
- Values and community, and
- Lake character.

Full details of the survey can be found at: <https://www.leonardlake.net/survey>

The online survey took place between May 25, 2020 and closed on June 29, 2020. Those who requested a paper version for manual completion were sent the survey by mail. To encourage participation the stakeholder group was contacted three times inviting them to participate.

The survey required the participant to identify themselves as a Property Owner (Property Owner-1 or Property Owner-2), Spouse of Owner, Family Member or other. All participants were required to enter their age category and 911 property address. This information was collected from all participating waterfront, backlot, surrounding property owners and other stakeholders.

To ensure a fair and unbiased survey, only “Property Owners” surveys were used in the analysis and rollup of the data into summary format, although comments from all respondents were captured. Also, to manage against perceived bias or a perceived outcome, when multiple owner responses were received (e.g., spouses/families who jointly own) the first response received was used as the official response. A third-party volunteer external to the LLSA Board independently analyzed and compiled the survey results. The LLSA Board did not have access to the data. The survey results were posted on the LLSA website on August 10, 2020 and an email was sent to all stakeholders advising of the survey report and link to access the information. In addition to posting the survey results in summary form, the entire data of responses was posted on the website for those that wanted to see the granular detail.

62% of all Leonard Lake property owners responded to the survey. While the vast majority of respondents were very supportive and aligned with the survey format, a very few participants commented that they felt the questions were too weighted towards preserving nature, leading to a predetermined outcome that could encroach on property rights.

The outcome of the survey identified three action items that formed the foundation for the development of the Lake Plan. These are:

- Development,
- Water – Quality and health, and
- Septic systems.

For the full scope of each action item, refer to slide 19 of the survey results at the link above.

Stakeholder Consultation

The development of the Lake Plan was guided by the TML OP, Section B – Waterfront, Section 14 – Lake Plan which outlines the typical contents of a Lake Plan.

The draft Lake Plan was posted on the LLSA website on October 25, 2020 and an email went to all stakeholders communicating the plan was available and providing links for review and/or download. The following is a summary of the communications to stakeholders and the consultations that occurred.

- November 7, 2020 - EBLAST to all stakeholders - 1st invitation for the upcoming Lake Plan calls with link to registration.
- November 15, 2020 - EBLAST to all stakeholders - 2nd invitation for the upcoming Lake Plan calls with link to registration.
- November 23, 2020 - EBLAST to all stakeholders - Lake Plan consultation update and feedback and to encourage participation
- November 28, 2020 - EBLAST to all stakeholders - Lake Plan consultation update on issues and amendments to the Lake Plan resulting from consultations and to encourage participation.
- December 6, 2020 – President’s personalized one-to-one e-mail to all remaining stakeholders that had not participated in one of the calls or personal conversations with a Board member to participate in final Zoom call on December 10, 2020.
- Lake Plan Call Schedule - November 19, 22, 23, 24, 29, December 1, 10. (6 ZOOM calls, 1 Conference call).
- In addition, some stakeholders requested a one-on-one call to review the Lake Plan and provide feedback. This was facilitated by a number of Board members.
- In addition, some stakeholders engaged in one-on-one e-mail exchanges with various Board members.

All communications outlined the consultation process and the ability to participate in an on-line confidential vote on the plan at the end of the call. All registered participants were emailed the call presentation materials prior to the meeting for their review. The calls were led by the LLSA President with support from Board members. The format allowed and encouraged open discussion on all topics and cross-referenced policies with the TML OP where appropriate. The consultation process led to the changing of one policy and clarification on a number of others. Stakeholders were asked to vote on the plan with amendments. One vote per property was permitted.

All stakeholders were advised that the TML Planning Department was asked to review the draft plan for their input and comments received were communicated to stakeholders.

The following is a summary of the stakeholders who participated in the consultation and final vote tally.

Six Zoom calls:	59
One Conference Call:	4
One-on-One Discussions:	18
Total # of Voting Participants:	81
Plan Support-# of Yes:	76
Plan Support-# of No:	5
Plan Support - % Yes:	94%
Plan Support - % No:	6%

Note: There were two stakeholders in addition to the 79 who participated in the consultation and voted that chose to participate and not to register a vote. Therefore, 81 stakeholders participated, 79 voted.

Township of Muskoka Lakes Consultation

The draft Lake Plan that formed the basis of the stakeholder consultations was shared with Mr. David Pink, Director of Development Services and Environmental Sustainability for comments on October 27, 2020. Mr. Pink provided comments back on November 13, 2020. A summary (paraphrased) of his comments and suggestions is below.

- Include previous LLSA water quality reports in the Lake Plan appendix,
- A number of comments on how to clarify some language and/or align with OP language,
- Advised that TML could not mandate higher level of septic treatment systems, i.e., tertiary systems, as such standards were governed by the Ontario Building Code,
- Advised that TML could not restrict backlot access to lakefront property over public lands,
- Requested a record of consultation regarding the stakeholder consultation process.

The final draft Lake Plan reflects the comments made by Mr. Pink and we thank him for his assistance.

Summary

The Lake Plan process has been an exhaustive undertaking that was first discussed at the LLSA Annual General Meeting in 2018 and a full-time effort for the last 12 months. The process made every attempt to contact all potential property owners and interested stakeholders to both inform them of the Lake Plan process and encourage them to become involved. All information was shared with all stakeholders that could be contacted by email, telephone or in person. The Lake Plan was carefully drafted to align with the results of the stakeholder survey and ongoing input received throughout this process.

In summary, the process of stakeholder engagement regarding the Leonard Lake Plan has resulted in the contact of approximately 97% of all Lake property owners and the participation of 50.3% of all property owners either through Lake Plan calls, telephone consultations or email consultations with the result that 94% of all Leonard Lake property owners who participated have voted in support of the Leonard Lake – Lake Plan.