



Muskoka

WATERSHED COUNCIL

Minutes

Friday, January 17, 2025

1:00 pm

Castle Peak Retirement Residence Multipurpose Room (Bracebridge Library) & Zoom

Present (In-person)

Aaron Rusak (Chair)
Peter Johnston
Geoff Ross
Kevin Trimble

Patricia Arney
Don Macintosh
Peter Sale

Andrew Fyfe
Michael Peppard
Bet Smith

Present (Zoom)

Nancy Alcock
Terry Crew
Richard Lammers

Mario Buszynski
Joan Frain
Cathy Oakden

John Cooper
Allan Hazelton
David Parsons

MWC Staff

Rebecca Willison

DMM Staff

Glenn Cunnington

Guests

Greg Padulo
Preston Nielsen *
Darkshan Sharif *

Sandy Cairns
Allison Needham *

Andy Gordon
Susan Gossage *

* Attended by Zoom

Welcome

MWC Chair Aaron Rusak called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm. MWC's Past-chair, Peter Sale, gave the land acknowledgement.

Confirmation of Minutes

MOTION

Moved by Aaron Rusak, seconded by Don Macintosh

THAT the Minutes of the Muskoka Watershed Council meeting dated November 22, 2024 be approved.

CARRIED

Committee Updates

- **Fundraising** – Peter Sale reported that the Fundraising Committee last met on December 18th and discussed the possibility of applying for charitable status, the pros and cons, and the potential impact on MWC's relationships with municipalities. The Committee also discussed the fundraising strategy developed by The Well Known Company, and then Peter emphasized the need for members to help raise funds.
- **Membership** – Pete LeMoine reported that he has reached out to all members with terms expiring at the AGM to see who would like to step down or stay for another term. An update will be provided at the AGM in February.
- **IWM Community Roundtable (CRT)** – Kevin Trimble reported that the CRT continues to meet monthly to discuss their ongoing work with the municipalities, public education, and partner NGOs. The Committee's focus is on three deliverables: a concise depiction of the IWM process, a detailed roadmap, and a synthesis of what is known about the watershed. Kevin noted that the CRT is going to be renamed as it transitions to being a project team of MWC.

Working Session

MWC Chair Aaron Rusak led a working session on the outcomes of the MWC strategic planning meetings held in October and December to gather additional input from MWC members on 2025 priorities.

Before starting discussions, the group did roundtable introductions.

IWM

Following introductions, discussion focused on the strategic direction of MWC and its role in integrated watershed management (IWM). The group recognized the need for a collaborative approach to manage the watershed effectively, involving various stakeholders such as municipalities, conservation organizations, and Indigenous groups. MWC should take a leading role in advancing the concept of IWM, providing advice and direction, and encouraging collaboration among stakeholders. The council also acknowledged the need for education and community engagement to build support for IWM. The District of Muskoka was identified as a key partner in this process, and Glenn Cunnington indicated that the District will be drafting a staff report on the feedback received during the breakout session at the November IWM meeting for municipalities to take forward to their respective councils. He noted that we should have a better idea of which municipalities want to participate in developing an IWM plan by this spring. The group also recognized the importance of engaging Indigenous groups in the collaborative process.

Events

The group then discussed the possibility of merging the Muskoka Summit on the Environment and the Muskoka Stewardship Conference into one event. The Summit, which has been successful in attracting external expertise, and the stewardship conference, which focuses on local initiatives, were considered for integration. The idea was met with mixed reactions, with some members suggesting that the two events could be combined into one, while others preferred to maintain their separate identities. The decision was left open, with the suggestion that MWC could consider merging the two events in the future. The council also acknowledged the need for

more resources and manpower to organize such events, and the importance of branding and marketing for their success.

Youth Engagement

The group discussed the importance of engaging students and the potential for the Summit to effectively engage them. The need for a chair for the 2025 Summit was discussed, with the possibility of involving students in this role. The idea of changing meeting times to accommodate students was also raised, with a survey to be sent out to gauge interest and preferred times.

Indigenous Relations

Aaron provided a quick update from his discussions with Greg Padulo about Indigenous engagement. Aaron would like to have an event that brings us closer to our local Indigenous communities, and he thinks a Blanket exercise is a way to do that. He is talking to his contacts to gather more information.

Communications

The group discussed the effectiveness of the communications activities spearheaded by the Well Known Company. Patricia Arney noted that most of the likes on social media are the same people, mostly MWC members. Does the extra content developed for MWC's social media channels translate to more knowledgeable people or more money raised? A Communications team is needed to drive things forward, including a Communications Committee Chair.

Gap Analysis

The discussion then shifted to the data synthesis project, which aims to pull together all known information about the watershed, including socio-economic data and other types of monitoring. Kevin Trimble suggested that this project could be a high priority and could involve a gap analysis to identify what's missing or needed next. The conversation wrapped up with a discussion on the potential for using data visualization tools to better understand the watershed, with an understanding that more direction is needed to effectively utilize these tools.

Summary of Action Items and Volunteer Opportunities

1. Strike ad-hoc committee for OP Review (need a chair to organize)
2. Strike a committee for Summit (need a chair and members)
3. Succession planning for Communications Committee
4. Leads for youth engagement
5. CRT transition to project team
6. Gap analysis assistance and planning

Partner Updates

- **Township of Lake of Bays** – Councillor Michael Peppard reported that participating Area Municipalities have each received their Regional Climate Change Mitigation Plan.
- **Town of Gravenhurst** – Councillor Peter Johnston reported that two senior staff members have been hired, one for policy writing and another for public engagement. Councillor Sandy Cairns reported that the Corporate GHG Inventory and Regional Climate Change Mitigation Plan is going to Gravenhurst Council next week. Sandy also volunteered to sit on the organizing committee for the next IWM meeting if it's hosted by Gravenhurst.

- **Health Unit** – Sandy Cairns reported that Dr. Charles Gardner is retiring in September from his position as Medical Officer of Health and Chief Executive Officer for the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit.

New Business

- None.

Next MWC Meeting

MWC's Annual General Meeting is scheduled for Friday, February 21st from 1-3 pm in the in the Castle Peak Retirement Residence Multipurpose Room at the Coulson Family Bracebridge Library, located at 34 Salmon Avenue in Bracebridge, and on Zoom.

Adjournment

Aaron Rusak adjourned the meeting at 2:45 pm.