



November 10, 2023

Council of The Township of Georgian Bay

99 Lone Pine Rd, Port Severn, Ont., L0K 1S0

Dear Councilors,

RE: 2024 Budget Draft #1

On behalf of the Cognashene Cottagers Association, I am writing to express our dismay at the first draft of the 2024 Budget. We recognize that this has not received approval (hopefully far from it!); but the fact that staff would even contemplate a 14% deficit in the bottom line is evidence that they just don't get that ratepayers are experiencing tax fatigue and that a tax increase of almost 6% is untenable, especially when taxes went up by over 5% for 2023.

Admittedly, it is hard to follow the Draft as it is not consistent with last year's: for example, there is no "Future Tax Forecast" included as there was last year. Nor are Salaries and benefits detailed in the Departmental reports.

SUGGESTION #1: make Budget presentations consistent from year to year.

It would appear the proposal is to increase staff by about 8 positions, some of which are summer students. The Draft indicates 51.3 FTE's, but it is unclear what the FTE's are for 2023. In any event, the Township can clearly not afford so many staff. At close to 50% of the overall budget and an increase of over 13% year over year these levels are not sustainable.

SUGGESTION #2: Eliminate all or most summer students.

SUGGESTION #3: Eliminate some staff positions. As noted last year, severance can be a form of investment, when it results in permanent savings.

Staff has assumed that you will approve various user fees: Burn Permits; MAT and Short-Term Rental Registration fees. This assumption (based on what analysis?) is to bring in \$440,000 of revenue. Without the Council's approval of these items, it is not appropriate to include them in Budget discussions other than as a scenario to be considered.

SUGGESTION #4: Take these user fees out of the Budget until an analysis can be done on how they are derived; and until Council approves them.

Council is to be commended for instructing staff to come up with significant savings for this year's budget. The result was still an overall increase in taxes of over 5%, but an over 11% increase in the TGB deficit. To be looking at an even larger deficit this year and a similar tax increase is not supportable. Why is it that the district is about to keep rate increases to below 5% and TGB cannot?

SUGGESTION #5: Instruct Staff to come up with savings of about \$1.4mm overall so as to keep taxes level for this year.

At the last budget meeting, it was put forward that the comparisons between municipalities in Muskoka District be further enhanced with additional comparisons. There is nothing in Draft #1 that does so.

SUGGESTION #5: Do comparisons between the various municipalities that Includes: 1) eliminating the industrial base, and comparing tax rates to assessment; 2) tax rates to overall budget; 3) per capita/ratepayer tax rates. Staff may have some other suggestions on appropriate metrics. (These comparisons may be helpful in 'getting a better deal' from the District, and indeed from the Province).

Those are our suggestions, for now. Hopefully all or most will be taken into account as you deliberate. We also hope to be able to report to our membership that Council has taken our concerns to heart and have come up with a responsible and reasonable Final 2024 Budget that all can live with.

Respectfully yours,

Gregg Badger

CCA Municipal Affairs