



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Creating the climate for success

Wasaga Beach – Town council is taking steps to ensure that Wasaga Beach has a solid foundation for years to come.

Ultimately, council is striving to create a community that reflects the wishes of residents today while meeting the needs of tomorrow.

Striking the right balance requires a responsible and sound approach to planning and development.

Council wants to create places that are attractive to its residents and build the community.

Yesterday, at council's Committee of the Whole meeting, members provided staff with direction on several items that when implemented will help chart the course forward.

At the meeting, members reviewed and discussed a staff report on possible changes to planning policies that apply to the downtown and beachfront areas of town.

Specifically, these polices are part of what is called Official Plan Amendment 52 (OPA).

Adopted by the previous council in June 2018, the OPA established a policy framework for the creation of a strategic growth area for Wasaga Beach. Referred to as the "downtown node" this area includes revitalization of Beach Areas 1 and 2.

Last year, council also approved a zoning bylaw to create development standards. And they approved urban design guidelines for the downtown too, providing guidance to private interests for the long-term development of Beach Areas 1 and 2 and the Main Street area.

The new council wanted the opportunity to review all of this information to ensure it properly reflects the community's vision for these lands.

"Council supports economic development in our town but we have to determine if the policies we have in place best reflect what we as a community want to see," Mayor Nina Bifulchi said. "We need to get this right and council believes that there are minor changes required to the plan that introduce flexibility in how the plan is implemented. Through this process, I have heard that members of council are generally supportive of most of the planning policies, but wanted to introduce flexibility to the plan. I think council demonstrated that today."

Council members provided staff with several comments yesterday. Based on the feedback, staff will provide council with recommendations through the Official Plan review process, which is currently under way.

Also during the Committee of the Whole meeting, members received a report on a proposed Municipal Class Environmental Assessment (EA) for Beach Areas 1 and 2.

The EA process started during the last term of council. However, the current council deferred proceeding with the work. They wanted to give the scope further consideration.

The initial focus of the assessment is specific to the beachfront and downtown area as outlined in the Downtown Master Plan and related design guidelines.

Committee directed staff to proceed with the EA, but asked that a broader look be taken so that council is provided with road alignment and streetscaping options as well as other tools that would ensure that road, pedestrian and bicycle features are incorporated in future designs.

“Flexibility is key to ensure that this part of our town becomes successful from an economic perspective,” Mayor Bifulchi said.

Also yesterday, committee further considered the development of Beach Area 1 and 2.

During the discussion, council indicated it does not believe the town should continue to own property at Beach Area 1 and in turn be responsible for the expense, maintenance, and operations of the properties. The general feeling is this does not reflect responsible use of taxpayer dollars.

Committee is recommending that staff be directed to look at a number of matters pertaining to the future development of the beachfront:

1. Committee has asked staff to consider options to divest the property.
2. They also directed staff to look at creating parcels of land that are “significant in size” so that development is not piecemeal. As part of the process, the town will retain lands for a festival square.
3. Committee also directed staff to define a request for expressions of interest process for the disposal of the properties and to provide council with timelines.

4. Staff are to provide a report on options to improve amenities at Beach Area 2 for residents and visitors to make it attractive on a year-round basis.
5. Staff were also directed to start the process to explore public parking at the beachfront and how best to deal with this need.
6. Finally, committee directed staff to update the list of studies required to ensure the beachfront properties are development ready.

During the discussion, it was noted that the FRAM Building Group had expressed an interest in developing at the beachfront. Mayor Bifulchi indicated, “that through an RFP process all developers would be welcome to consider developing at the beachfront.”

Staff were also directed to advise prospective tenants in town-owned buildings at the beachfront, as well as lease renewals, that council is prepared to consider two-year leases with a demolition clause if the properties are sold.

Members of council also discussed the future of the Main Street Market, which added activity to a depressed area, but has struggled to meet its financial targets. The leases for the market kiosks have come due this year and all market tenants have been notified. The beer garden has two years left on its lease.

Council directed staff to advise Main Street Market kiosk tenants that council is prepared to extend their leases until Dec. 31, 2019, and further that the beer garden tenant be advised the lease will be terminated in accordance with the terms of their lease.

The discussion then turned to whether the town wishes to continue its agreement with Wasaga Beach Provincial Park, which allows the municipality to manage and maintain Beach Area 1. The town entered into a four-year agreement with the province in the spring of 2017 to manage the area.

Due to the high cost of the agreement – the total cost for 2018 is almost \$500,000 – council directed staff to notify the province the town will terminate the agreement after this season on Oct. 31, 2019. Council also directed staff to engage in discussions with the province to see if a new agreement can be reached that will permit the town to have control over special events and maintenance of the beach.

“Council will continue its work to get our town headed in a direction that is successful for everyone,” Mayor Bifulchi said. “We’ve been on the right path before and I know we can get there again.”

Residents can watch the full meeting here: <http://bit.ly/2SAA4u3>

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