

LAKE OF BAYS THE CHILL, OUTDOOR RECREATION CAPITAL OF MUSKOKA

A Practical Plan for Our Community

MIKE JEFFORD

Candidate for Township Councillor - RIDOUT WARD

About me, and what I believe.

Although some candidates like to avoid specifics, I feel that the residents of Dorset, Baysville and the land/lakes in between deserve to know exactly what I believe in, and my vision for the future of our community/lakes and township. Lake of Bays to me is Muskoka's natural, chill gem. World class lakes and rivers that must be preserved as natural and healthy as possible, surrounded by three main hamlets of Baysville, Dorset and Dwight. It is very much a low key place to live, cottage, work, retire or raise a family. This general character should not change.

I have been a resident of Baysville for 7 years, having previously lived in Bracebridge for 10 years. My original move to Muskoka 17 years ago was within weeks of completing 3 years of college for renewable energy technician and business. My background has always been in entrepreneurship, having started my landscape construction business MJCmuskoka.ca when I was 17 and have been running it ever since, just off referrals. Along with landscaping I run a side business MuskokaRiverAdventures.ca offering guided tours to visitors. In the winter, I have a long-term contract to build/maintain two outdoor ice rinks for the Town of Bracebridge, and I help promote/market these winter attractions. When I was in Bracebridge I won the Mayor's Award of Excellence for my volunteer work in the community and have volunteered to put up winter lights in the park in Baysville the last few years. I bought my first property in Lake of Bays Township in 2018 with approx. 145 acres and 2km of waterfront on the Muskoka River, and after living in-town Baysville for 6 years I recently bought a second property, a home on the Muskoka River on Fairy Falls Rd. Outside of work, my interests include all things outdoors, the Dorset Rec Centre, travelling to 35+ countries, friends/family/neighbours. Lake of Bays Township is and will be my home for years to come.

What skills/ideas would I bring to Lake of Bays council?

Lake of Bays, the Outdoor Recreation Capital of Muskoka

The type of growth I think would be most beneficial to Lake of Bays is not through spikes in new lot creation, but in outdoor recreation tourism, especially shoulder seasons and winter, and not on main lakes. Several new hiking/snowshoe/fat bike/cross country trails created and listed on popular apps. Social media promotion to bring attention to outdoor recreation opportunities such as Frost Centre winter trails and the Dorset Ice Palace will bring tourists from towns such as Gravenhurst, Bracebridge and Huntsville who would love to stop in communities such as Dorset, Baysville and Dwight on their visit. A bike lane added from Baysville to Dorset (to start). Snowmobile club support and amenity upgrades. Programs to incentivize local accommodation providers for winter months such as MAT and some STR by-law exemptions. Dwight has Algonquin at its doorstep, Dorset has the Frost Centre, and Baysville will soon have expanded amenities at Bigwind Lake.

Bigwind Lake Provincial Park & Hindon Forest

Bigwind Lake Provincial Park will be the first operating provincial park created in 40 years. Although it is looking as though plans will be phased, long-term plans may include modern year-round amenities for our community to use, new trails, and potentially over a hundred campsites and many roofed accommodations. Improved road access should be reviewed.

Safer, higher quality roads

I believe that Echo Lake Rd, especially sections closer to Baysville could be improved even further for safety and quality, including horizontal and vertical alignment. It is a district road, but I would make working on this a top priority as much as I can as a local ward councillor. Old highway 117 needs to feel like a cottage road speed wise especially where there are cottages on the south side of the road, and I would work with locals, review the best approaches, and find the appropriate solution to ensure that it does. In general, cottages on side roads pay a lot in taxes and they deserve high quality roads, all year round, nothing less. Generally, I will support spending on quality, safe roads throughout the township.

Lake of Bays Township initiatives, work & regulation

I agree with programs such as septic inspections. Although these should be reasonable, primarily target mid-serious issues and give generous or phased timelines to respect owner's budgets/planning. Severance of existing waterfront lots is not a good thing for natural preservation, property values and lake health, and owning 2km of waterfront myself this would affect me but believe it's in the best interest of the communities. Existing lots should have clear, simple guidelines while trying to respect personal agency over one's property and emphasizing/enforcing shoreline preservation to keep the lakes natural.

Growth of Government in small towns and rural

Most people, especially in small towns and rural don't want to feel like a big government is micromanaging their lives. I would address issues with a laser focus and respect personal agency for residents as much as possible. The municipality should not bring Lake of Bays appropriate level regulation to small town and rural areas for example, through all zone blanket by-laws. Laser focused and traditional zone/lake class specific regulation should be the by-law standard and should be a last resort.

Economic Development in the communities of Baysville & Dorset.

I believe with the rest of council's support, I can help create the economic conditions needed for businesses to excel and make new investments in our communities, mainly through connecting with owners, targeted programs, and focusing on off-season tourism. More opportunities for entrepreneurs, positive business growth, vibrant beautiful small towns, and employment opportunities so residents can afford housing. I would support Lake of Bays Brewery's planning application to build a beautiful timber frame pavillion covered patio for one example. Entrepreneurs in Dorset and Baysville have made big efforts to stay open in winter months recently despite slow sales, and I will work harder than anyone to bring in shoulder season and winter tourists to thank these businesses for staying open, while creating more of a year-round life/economy here.

More support for volunteer fire fighters & health care

Our volunteer fire fighters are much more than just fire fighters. They are also frontline EMS providers which every resident seasonal or year-round should be thankful for. These positions deserve the highest appreciation in my opinion and will always have my full support. The Dorset Health Hub is also so important to our community.

Incentive Programs

Regulation has increased dramatically in recent years, and instead of clawing back the regulation, I think it would be best to create several new programs to incentivize what we do want. For one example, I believe people in Lake of Bays would benefit from a program to help build basic one and two bay garages so that residents can get their belongings, toys, tools, vehicles and working space indoors, and out of the snow, rain and bugs. Pre-approved drawings, opening up holes in the by-laws for this specific type of development especially in rural, small town and beyond 30m of the waterfront, and planners who work for residents to make it happen. There are shipping containers and plastic garages everywhere, and the goal of this program would be to get them replaced with garages. Another example is the previously mentioned MAT and STR relief for off season.

A happy, fun life

We have some great service clubs, community groups, lake associations, events, & sports and recreation groups in our community. They will always have my support. They make our community. A goal of mine would be to bring more fun and healthy living opportunities to year-round and seasonal residents.

Listening to residents

Residents should have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect their lives, properties, neighbourhoods and communities. Although I have ideas, being a representative of the community is just that. I am a problem solver and have great relationships in-person with clients & members of the community. I look forward to hopefully working with you, and I am always a short coffee meeting, drop-in visit, call, text, e-mail, WhatsApp, or Facebook message away. You will find me in your local/lake Facebook group asking for feedback, input, and conducting polls to gain insight to serve you better.

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