

Candidate Questionnaire
2018 Municipal Election

Candidate: *Peter Cooper*

Please use as much space as you require to fully answer the questions.

General

➤ Please provide a short bio of your Professional, Community and Municipal experience and explain how your particular skills will enhance decision making at Council.

On a professional level, I have been involved in a variety of senior roles in leadership; as an executive running a large organization, but also serving on a number of boards. My community involvement has included multiple roles with the Georgian Bay Land Trust- roles that have afforded me the opportunity to meet many people along the eastern shores of the Bay. My role as a District Area Councillor for the past 4 years has educated me on the challenges faced by our township. Some of these roles have allowed me to assist in the recruitment and development of dynamic teams. These skills, as well as my being a team player, will help me foster a new and more positive direction for the council at the Township of Georgian Bay.

Services, Taxation and Good Governance

➤ Describe your two highest priorities for our municipality, in the short term and the long term?

The answer to this pretty straight-forward. We are paying inordinately high taxes, somewhere between 50% to over 100% higher than our neighbouring municipalities. And yet we have little opportunity to access many District services because most are located to the east in Muskoka. And as many of us know, the transportation corridors in this area run north south and yet the services we pay for are located to the east. Thus we have little chance for getting much of an ROI on our district tax contributions.

As for good governance at the T of GB, that is another major issue which I hope will be rectified by electors voting for far better representation on council and to ensure that we have members who have far higher standards of performance and ethics.

➤ Many constituents believe that the services provided to seasonal residents are not commensurate with the taxes paid. What steps would you take to address this concern?

See above, but I believe that the only real solution in the longer term is to find a way to convince the province that we are not getting, nor do we need, the services which we are paying for at the District of Muskoka. And so we must find a way to secede from the District of Muskoka and either go it alone, or join one of our neighbouring single tier townships to the north, whether that might be the Archipelago, Carling or some other newly developed and more suitable municipal structure.

Environment

➤ Summarize your position on maintaining a balance between environmental sustainability and economic development. How important is it, and is a balance currently being maintained?

*I happen to believe that the **Environment is the Economy and the Economy is the Environment**. Essentially they are inextricably linked. Furthermore, the township should learn to assist its communities to focus on the largest single customer base (seasonal residents) by understanding that this is our primary customer rather than chasing after the minimal dollars coming in from tourism. If we can do this, our local permanent population will start to thrive.*

➤ The Township has financially supported Georgian Bay Forever along with several cottage associations in their efforts to control and eventually eradicate invasive Phragmites (Australis). What additional steps do you believe that the Township should be taking to assist with these efforts?

The township has only so many financial resources and I believe that the key to control of invasive species is to help citizens control these species in their own back yards. The most successful communities in controlling invasive species have always been attentive to problems, like Phrag, and have been on top of it long enough to keep it under control. The township needs to assist those communities who have let this get out of control with programs which will be managed and solved locally.

➤ Are you satisfied with the costs and outcomes of the programs undertaken by Georgian Bay Township to help improve/maintain water quality in the Township, including water quality testing and the inspection/maintenance of residential septic systems? If not, what action or changes would you recommend?

As the current Chair of the Water Quality committee for the T of GB I have been very disappointed with this entire program. Water quality at the T of GB has been focused on testing, not remediation for far too many years. This focus on the status quo, has been a complete failure and by focusing on just testing, and always in the same areas, while getting essentially, year after year, the same exact results, that is what has been described by some as, insanity.

And I asked those who support the current program, over and over again, "To what end?" Especially when we know that we have problem areas. Two areas of known concern are in Church Bay in Honey Harbour, and the waters off the Oak Bay golf course development. But with the current majority of councillors who think that the status quo is just fine. And be it the Muskoka Watershed Council or the two Severn Sound environmental organizations, the current players examining this water quality issue think that everything is just peachy. In addition we are paying very high annual fees for basic water testing, instead of obtaining competitive bids and using the savings to do remedial work in our problem areas.

I say "IT IS CERTAINLY NOT ALL PEACHY!"

Planning

➤ With regard to planning regulations and enforcement within Georgian Bay Township, how will you manage a balanced approach to protecting the interests of property owners and protecting the Georgian Bay ecosystem?

Planning is the most controversial and misunderstood aspect of our municipal government. Key to understanding this governance function for the waterfront areas of coastal Georgian Bay is that we are located on a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve which makes this even more challenging and therefore it is essential to get it right.

Planning is an area which, in and of itself, implies the restriction of individual property rights for the good of the larger community. But even more poorly understood is that planning evolves and almost always becomes more restrictive over time- as development pressures become more intense.

Another issue is that most constituents/property owners misunderstand that because a neighbour was able to get approval for something several years ago, does not mean that approval should or would apply to your property today. I happen to believe that our planning situation at the T of GB is out of control. There are so many exceptions being made to the plan that exceptions now rule, not the plan. And that is because a few contractors in our community have an inordinate amount of influence with the planning and building department staff, and with the majority of our current Council. This leads to uneven, unfair or biased planning and enforcement decisions for our property owners. This must get

rectified in the next term of council. There are a number of measures and best practices which need to be put into place. An example of that is contractors should advise but not have a seat on the Committee of Adjustment, or any Planning Committee struck by Council, because of the inherent opportunity for direct conflict of interest.

➤ Community Plans reflect the specific characteristics of each community. How will you protect their integrity and ensure the continued adherence to existing and future community plans?

The community plans play a very important role for many of our communities. Those plans likely will evolve over time, but they must reflect the wishes of the majority of residents, not minor special interest groups.

I will continue to vote against individual applications that will erode the efficacy and meaning of our community plan and if we elect enough like-minded individuals to Council, I will move for some new practices, education sessions and provide direction to the CAO to instruct our Planning Department to achieve best practices in planning .

Community Engagement

➤ There are many stakeholder groups that are active or reside in Georgian Bay Township, including First Nations communities, community (cottage) associations, Georgian Bay focused organizations, and provincial and federal government agencies. In what ways are you satisfied that Georgian Bay Township is doing enough to work together cooperatively and productively with these stakeholders and in what ways do you believe that improvements are needed? If so, what improvements would you recommend?

In general, I do not believe that the T of GB has been engaging very well with stakeholders and while there have been surveys conducted from time to time, little attention is paid to the feedback, and that is problematic. The only real solution to this is political. We need a new council comprised of members who are really interested in listening to all stakeholders.

➤ How do you envision communicating with constituents, many of whom live out of the municipality for parts of the year, to get their opinions, hear their concerns and inform them of important township initiatives?

I think our township administration needs to up its game with electronic communication. And that means two way communication and the best way might be to ask all constituents to provide an email address so that information can flow back and forth. Also planning related public meetings should be held to make accommodation for those who want to

attend but must cover the greatest distances. Also, where applicable and when the bulk of the population in the area are seasonal, then important meetings covering critical issues should be held when the seasonal residents are in residence, ie. May through October.

Other

➤ If you have thoughts on topics not covered in the above questions or would like to just add a closing comment please feel free to do so here.

I believe that the election of 2018 is the most critical election opportunity we have had in our lifetime and the 48 year history of this township. The residents need to get out and vote and elect those who will be capable of looking out for your best interests.