

TALPINES PROPERTY OWNERS' ASSOCIATION WAUBAUSHENE, TAY TOWNSHIP

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

This submission was prepared in response to Tay Township's call for input into its Strategic Plan for the future.

Talpines POA

Talpines POA is a non-profit, volunteer community group based in Waubauskene, in the township of Tay. The group's focus is, and has been for many years, on improving the community through active engagement on environmental and municipal issues; creating and supporting community connections; supporting the Tay Trail, libraries, community hubs, water testing, strong, peaceable and neighbourly communities, and good governance.

For many years, Talpines POA has worked to improve the Pine Street beach to return it to the pleasant and welcoming place for families it once was, and to periodically test the surrounding waters of Sturgeon Bay to ensure that the community's greatest asset remains safe for community use. The Township has supported Talpines' efforts at the Pine Street beach with support from the Parks Department in removal of beach debris, and this year, in awarding a grant for the purpose of establishing a garden.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD COMMUNITY?

In our province, much focus has been placed on larger, urban centres. As a rural community with a relatively small population and taxation base

spread across numerous settlement areas and small villages, we recognize that it is challenging to create community engagement and inclusion, and to provide the types of services citizens need and want. However, the Township can, and in our view, should, be guided in its Strategic Plan by the wealth of social science on what makes a good community.

Jane Jacobs (1916-2006) was instrumental in championing the community-based approach towards building better cities and societies. Many studies have built upon these ideas. This recent excerpt from the New York Times provides an excellent summary:

CHOOSING A HAPPY COMMUNITY

What factors make a community a place where people are happy? The [Knight Foundation and Gallup](#) interviewed 43,000 people in 26 communities to find out.

- 1. Openness: People are happy when they live in a community that is welcoming to all.*
- 2. Beauty: Living in a scenic, picturesque or charming community, with lots of trees and green space, makes people happier.*
- 3. Social opportunities: When a community is designed to foster social connections — restaurants, community spaces, sidewalks, trails and other public spaces — people are happier.*

The lesson is that where you live can have a profound effect on your happiness. If you don't fit in, if you don't know your neighbors, if walking outside doesn't put a spring in your step — find a new place to live if you can afford it. Explore new neighborhoods, rent before you buy, talk to friends, talk to potential neighborhoods and relocate your way to a happier life. The key, says Jay Walljasper, author of [“How to Design Our World for Happiness,”](#) is to find a place where neighbors can encounter each other spontaneously. Look for neighborhoods with a green commons, sidewalks, parks, street festivals and community gatherings. If you're in the city, choose an apartment with a shared backyard or a street known for its

Halloween festival or a community newsletter. Look for signs that the people there are connected and create opportunities to connect with each other on a regular basis.

SPEND TIME IN NATURE

[Numerous studies](#) support the notion that spending time in nature is good for you. We know that walking on quiet, tree-lined paths can result in meaningful improvements to mental health, and even physical changes to the brain. Nature walkers have “quieter” brains: scans show less blood flow to the part of the brain associated with rumination. [Some research shows](#) that even looking at pictures of nature can improve your mood.

New York Times July 16, 2019

While it is unrealistic to assume that a municipal council can make all of its citizens « happy », we urge Tay Township to protect, preserve and enhance the tremendous natural resources in our community and to adhere to these principles for all future development. Noted author Jay Walljasper has summarized the ingredients and steps for good community planning as follows:

- 1. Give people a place to hangout*
- 2. Give people something to see*
- 3. Give people something to do*
- 4. Give people a place to sit down*
- 5. Give people a safe, comfortable place to walk*
- 6. Give people a safe, comfortable place to bike*
- 7. Give people reliable, comfortable public transportation*
- 8. Make the streets safe*
- 9. Make sure the streets are safe—not just from crime but from traffic*
- 10. Remember the streets belong to everyone—not just motorists*
- 11. Don't forget about the needs of older neighbors*
- 12. Don't forget about the needs of kids*
- 13. Let your community go to the dogs*
- 14. Reclaim front yards as social spaces*
- 15. Remember the best neighborhoods, even in big cities, feel like villages*

16. Plan for winter weather as well as sunny, warm days
17. Don't fear density—people enjoy being around other people
18. Don't give up hope—great changes are possible when neighbors get together
19. Build on what's good in your community to make things even better
20. Remember the power of the commons: people working together for the benefit of everyone
21. Never underestimate the power of a shared meal to move people into action
22. Start with small steps—like planting flowers
23. Become a community booster, watchdog, patriot
24. Learn from other neighborhoods in your town and around the world
25. Take the time to have fun and enjoy what's already great about your neighborhood

—JAY WALLJASPER

Adapted from a presentation that Jay Walljasper, Senior Fellow at On The Commons, presents to neighborhood, civic, business, and professional groups around the country. For more information, contact Jay@JayWalljasper.com or see JayWalljasper.com.

FOSTERING INCLUSION

Unfortunately, there is a perception among inhabitants in some of the settlement areas, hamlets and rural areas, that the Township focuses too heavily on Victoria Harbour and Port McNicoll. While it is true that these are larger population areas already capable of, and approved, for further subdivision development, we believe it is important for Council to devote time and resources towards addressing the needs of those in smaller Tay areas. A review of budgets both current and historical reveals that the vast majority of property tax dollars have been directed towards these two larger centres.

Yet, the social needs of citizens not living in these two larger centres are arguably greater. There appears to be minimal community investment in smaller areas. We also ask Council to be aware that at Council meetings, and in Council publications, we rarely hear mentioned the rural hamlets of Ebenezer, Elliots Corners, Melduf, Mertz's Corners, Ogden's Beach, Old Fort, Paradise Point, Riverside, Sturgeon Bay, Triple Bay Park, Vasey, Waubaushene and Waverley. In our view, it is important to make a point of mentioning these communities, making an effort to reach out to citizens

living there, surveying them as to their needs, and explicitly addressing their needs in the Strategic Plan. It may be more difficult to solicit input on the Strategic Plan from inhabitants in these areas but special effort could be made. In our view, it is crucial for the creation of a cohesive Township.

The Environment

The Strategic Plan should focus and plan on concrete measures for protection of the environment, and our precious native species such as at-risk turtles. Signage is one step but turtle crossings could be delineated in yellow « crosswalks » on our roads to alert motorists. The Township has taken steps to support organizations that address invasive species such as Phragmites removal, but more funding is needed as the invasion grows.

The Library

In Waubaushene, the library is an incredibly important resource for our youth, our seniors, and the residents who have limited access to transportation. When the two schools closed in Waubaushene, students were forced to bus to other towns. Busing makes participation in after school sports or other activities difficult, and raises impediments to student research, homework or general study. The library is a valuable resource for kids as the dedicated staff run yoga sessions, reading and story time, crafts and other activities essential to children. Seniors can walk to the local library and reduce their social isolation and access free books, and internet. Our library seems to be under constant attack. We must fight to preserve it, and we urge the Township to protect this small, local branch. Our youth do not have a great deal of support in Waubaushene. The Benny club tries valiantly, with limited resources, to provide activities for youth. Parents in Waubaushene are hard pressed to access activities for their children. Much travel and expense is involved.

Community Hub

We also urge the Township to include a plan to establish a community hub in Waubaushene. A community effort to seek provincial funding to establish a community hub in the former Hazel Street public school was not supported by the previous Council. At that time, Council indicated that it would consider building a new building in Waubaushene to establish a hub, but no steps were taken to do so. A community hub could provide space for the library, make use of an existing gym for youth and seniors, house a rotating health room, rent out space, serve as a trail head for the Tay Trail and perhaps even establish a cafe. When a community hub was initially proposed, hundreds of local groups, business, Health professionals and citizens supported the concept. The Strategic Plan should, in our submission, include a detailed plan to create and support a Waubaushene community hub.

Citizens should be consulted, and respected about their views on the location of the hub. The Township land at Bridgeview is not a popular location.

Internet Access

Tay Township studied the issue of internet access and the study revealed that Tay is not well serviced by broadband. This impacts all citizens and businesses. Without a strategic plan to address this gap, Tay will continue to be underserved, with spotty, expensive internet. This is a major impediment to tourism, to industry growth, and to the well being of citizens. Our students need excellent internet access. Families struggle to obtain it and pay for it. We look to Tay to develop a comprehensive and rapid plan to address this issue.

TAY TRAIL

The Trail is a jewel in our Township. Yet, it is experiencing growth in usage by fast moving ebikes, motorcycles, and fast moving large cycling groups. This growth appears unregulated. Rules of the Trail are necessary. They should be published and enforced. In our submission, the Strategic Plan should map out how to regulate improper use through the regular deployment of by-law officers, and the imposition of fines as deterrents. Also, the Township should plan to notify bike clubs of the rules of the road: establish speed limits, require notification by bells and warnings to pedestrians, and keep to one side of the Trail. The Township should include strategic planning to paint a dividing line in yellow on the Trail to indicate lanes. The Trail is so important to the citizens of Tay and their happiness, but left unattended, it will become unsafe and diminish as an asset for residents, or a tourist draw. It is noteworthy that Tay's by-law report to Council states that no tickets have been issued to date for motorized vehicles on the Trail.

Tourism

We support and appreciate tourism in our Township. It is crucial for our local business, and it stimulates growth. However, for tourists to want to spend time here, they need infrastructure: activities, clean water to swim and do water sports, restaurants, places to park, and places to rent. There is a long history of cottage rentals and bed and breakfast establishments in the area. However, with the proliferation of Air BnB establishments, special attention must be paid to regulate these types of rentals. In particular, we believe that the Strategic Plan should specifically address tourism infrastructure. Resources must be deployed to encourage and enhance tourism, but also to regulate behaviour, especially noise. To this end we support the addition of another bylaw officer whose portfolio

should include observation and regulation of the Trail, and rapid response to noise complaints. Inappropriate use of rentals will erode community fabric and affect the peaceable enjoyment of the community by residents and cottage owners. In our view, existing by-law officers could also reduce the focus on canine control towards bigger issues. We also do not support the « vigilante » approach to by-law enforcement. With more by-law officers in place, this unfortunate approach can be reduced.

Wastewater infrastructure

Waubashene and other areas in the township operate on septic systems. While septic inspection programs should continue, we believe that a long term strategic plan to develop wastewater systems and treatment is necessary in the communities where it does not exist. Our aquifers are shallow and according to recent Tay studies, vulnerable. These are expensive, long term projects, which require long term planning and budgeting. They are crucial for the long term health of residents, and our water systems. There should also be a strategic plan to continue to invest in enhancements for Victoria Harbour's wastewater treatment to ensure that there are no spills or releases of sewage into Georgian Bay.

Conclusion

As citizens of Tay, we recognize the hard work and good intent of our elected officials to provide thoughtful, good governance. It is only through open sharing of information, frequent consultation and respect for public input that community engagement will be enhanced. We appreciate the opportunity to provide input, and the outreach Council has implemented to create its Strategic Plan. We hope many more public meetings will be held by Council on community issues in future.

On a final note, Talpines POA opposes the Ford government's move towards amalgamation. We firmly believe that smaller communities such as ours will be subsumed, and ignored, by larger adjacent communities. We seek to preserve our separate voice and independent status as Tay Township.