



January 17, 2025

New Year's Message from the Chair of the Save South Muskoka Hospital Committee, Jason Cole:

Happy New Year! With this New Year upon us, I am writing to introduce myself as the recently-appointed Chair for the Save South Muskoka Hospital Committee (SSMHC). This time of year also allows us to highlight our accomplishments through 2024 and to identify priorities for the next 12 months.

First off, a little about myself and my drive to save South Muskoka Memorial Hospital: I am a husband and father in this wonderful community. Having grown up here, despite spending a few years afar, Muskoka has always been my home. I take great pride raising my children in this unique and wonderful place. To me, Muskoka embodies important values such as a great respect for the beauty of our environment, and more importantly, it's a place where caring neighbours build strong community.

Previous generations in Muskoka ensured that access to hospital healthcare is an essential and cherished part of living here. As it has been for many residents, South Muskoka Memorial Hospital has been an important backdrop in my life to both deep sorrow through great loss and incredible joy from a stork's new arrival. I have always been grateful for the care close to home given and received and I never questioned whether such care could be in jeopardy – that is, until MAHC unveiled its plans for hospital redevelopment in January 2024. Needless to say, MAHC's concerning redevelopment plans inspired me and countless others, including the local medical community, to stand up for the future of South Muskoka Memorial Hospital.

Throughout my involvement with SSMHC over this last year, I witnessed inspiring and tremendous hard work by volunteers, residents, businesses, and others who chose to support our local doctors and the future of South Muskoka Memorial Hospital. We all know that there is much at stake. And there are many good reasons to be critical of MAHC's conduct, broken community trust and worrisome hospital plans which the SSMHC has documented. Truly, it is due to the passion and voices of people across Muskoka that we have been able to force change at MAHC from the initial plan of a recklessly harmful 14 beds with no obstetrics for South Muskoka. At this time, we can reflect on these courageous efforts with pride and we should be encouraged by this progress as we advance our advocacy for more change.

Into 2025, SSMHC will continue to support and represent the strong community opposition in South Muskoka against MAHC's hospital redevelopment plans. This includes supporting the call for ongoing change from our local doctors and other healthcare professionals. We are also encouraged by the public support from our local Chambers of Commerce. **SSMHC will persist with our key message that the future South Muskoka hospital site requires at least 60 acute care beds to address a growing and aging population, as outlined in the Care Close to Home (V2) model released last August.**

Further, where MAHC's plan is proceeding with the Ontario Ministry of Health, we continue to advocate for change so that the hospital healthcare model incorporates care close to home to assure better patient outcomes. We will also continue on our inquiry into the site selection process and the appropriateness of the current site. We are investigating the price tag associated with these hospital redevelopments relative to other builds across the province. We are collecting important data on transportation access and needs across Muskoka relative to the Huntsville site. We continue to consult with our local elected officials. In short, the year ahead will be about advancing public accountability and change.

My personal goal for 2025 as Chair is to encourage the passion and advocacy on this issue from each person in Muskoka whose future healthcare services are at stake. There so many residents and cottagers who share SSMHC's concerns about the future of hospital healthcare close to home. This is now too important a cause to ignore.

All of us can continue to play a role in 2025: Please continue to raise your concerns about MAHC's hospital redevelopment plans with friends, family and elected officials. Stay informed by visiting our website (www.ssmh.ca). Volunteer with SSMHC or donate to our cause. Let's continue to show MAHC, the province and our elected officials that South Muskoka fights for healthcare - for our friends, family, neighbours and community.

Wishing you all a safe and healthy 2025.

Sincerely,



Jason Cole
Chair, SSMHC