

The VIEW from BLUE

Published by Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association

www.bluemountainratepayers.ca

Box 405, Collingwood, ON L9Y 3Z7

The largest ratepayers' association in The Blue Mountains

April 2012

Board of Directors for 2012

President

Michael Seguin
519-599-7179
mpseguin@rogers.com

Vice-President & Social Media Advisor

Lester Posen
705-445-3528
lbposen@rogers.com

Secretary (Newsletter)

Catherine Sholtz-Seguin
519-599-7179
mpseguin@rogers.com

Treasurer (Membership)

Peter Sharpe
705-446-0825
pesharpe@rogers.com

Directors

Denis Fennessy
705-445-5679
djf@rogers.com

Paul Mitchell
599-519-7793
mitch@bmts.com

Bill McKetrick
705-888-4108
b.mcketrick@rogers.com

Kim Posen
905-445-3528
kposen@rogers.com

Dorothy Healey
705-445-5447
dihealey@bmts.com

Web Site Advisor
Neil Carscadden
519-599-5006
ncarsca@prodigy.net

Please share this newsletter
with a neighbour and suggest
they join our Association

Taxpayers pay for discretionary spending & padding!



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

by Michael P. Seguin

Throughout the 2012 budget process, it became obvious to me that both Council and staff wanted the taxpayers to think that they were offering a “bare bones and fiscally responsible” budget, and that a “year of lost revenue” would put tremendous pressure on their ability to deliver current services.

“Wow,” I thought, “they must be kidding?” You would think this municipality is or will be in financial difficulty and our services will be threatened. No wonder they started the 2012 budget process by jacking up the town levy increase from a forecast 6.2% to 8.06%.

In my message to Council on Jan. 23, 2012, posted on the BMRA Website, I pointed out many areas of discretionary spending and padding that have led to several hidden annual tax surpluses being transferred out to a General Surplus Slush Fund. According to a Town-audited statement, this fund had accumulated to \$2.0 million in 2010 and is used to pay off deficits in reserve funds and overspent departments (e.g., the Building Department).

Interestingly, tender bids have been received in 2012 for two proposed projects: Slabtown Bridge construction and the old town hall demolition. Meanwhile, the town is about to realize a

See *President's Report* page 2

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (for members in good standing only)

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association will be held

Saturday, May 26th, 2012 at 8.30 a.m.

at the:

**THE MARSH STREET CENTRE – AUDITORIUM
187 MARSH STREET, CLARKSBURG**

(Main entrance on the east side of Marsh Street, just north of Clark Street and south of the community of Thornbury. public parking is available across the street next to and behind the Legion Building)

For the purpose of:

1. Receiving the Report of the Directors;
2. Receiving the Financial Report for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2011;
3. Election of Board Directors;
4. Proposed Amendments to the Bylaws;
4. Transacting any other business presented at the meeting;
5. Question and answer period.

By Order of the Board, March 3, 2012
Michael P. Seguin, President
Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association

Although the meeting is scheduled for 8.30 a.m., please arrive by 8.15 a.m. for registration, cookies and coffee.

President's Report

Continued from page 1

surplus of approximately \$733,559, most of which comes directly out of taxation.

So, were the budgeted amounts for these two projects “padded” or was this just plain luck?

The Town's Overview of the 2012 budget was released to the public at the end of February by Deputy Mayor McKinlay, asking the taxpayer: “What does the proposed budget mean to you?” Why bother asking? The taxpayer already knows that he or she won't get a response.

Having attended all public meetings on this topic, I can assure you that there was little consultation with the public (only one meeting but no discussion and no debate), despite the Deputy Mayor's remarks. Only one concession was granted, based on many complaints: a reprieve from a garbage user tax-grab fee. Maybe Mr. McKinlay thinks the many complaints that were received represent “public consultation.”

Mr. McKinlay stated in his Overview that “actual operating costs have only increased 1.0% in 2012, despite inflationary increases relating to our utilities and insurance costs.” What he hasn't told the public is that the 1.0% is an inflated amount based on 2011 budget estimates and not on actual lower costs and that Council did approve a 2.9% increase to allow for inflation. His facts and the rest of his political rhetoric (wise decisions, best interests of our community, long-term sustainability of our community, unwavering commitment and greater good of the community, etc.) can be considered “discretionary.”

In my opinion, these comments are just additional “padding” to help justify Council's “supposed” great decisions in arriving at a substantial Town tax levy increase of 6.36% and water and sewer rate increases of 5%.

Who is responsible for this government? The sad fact is that we are because we voted them into office.

I think they are hitting us hard in the early part of their mandate and hoping to weather the storm until the next election (2014). In the meantime, Council budgets in the last two years have continued to compound the hardships and ability of this community to pay, especially our “permanent” residents. No wonder our permanent population continues to decline (down 5.5% from 2006-2011) and the Town has tax arrears in the \$4.0 million range (2010 Town Audited Statement).

If you have any questions regarding the 2012 Budget, please contact me anytime and I will be glad to give you my honest opinions. We need to be more

vigilant in dealing with the 2013 budget.

If you want to read more on my 2012 budget comments, I direct you to the Current Articles' section on our website: www.bluemountainratepayers.ca

In the meantime, we welcome any comments you have regarding statements in this report and throughout the newsletter. You can contact me at info@bluemountainratepayers.ca.

As I have always said and will continue to say: “You are the heart and soul of the Association and we value your opinion.”

Vice-President's Report:

A year has come and gone

By Lester Posen

Where did the time go? It was just a year ago that we were all sitting together at the Annual General Meeting, wondering where the previous year had gone. As you can see from our Presidents' Report there is a great deal going on in the town that needs your involvement and attention.

The Association has not been sitting still. We have been working and continuing to ensure that our message is getting out. This is a big job and the weight of this task falls on the shoulders of Michael Seguin, your president. We are fortunate to have a person of his quality and talent not only involved in the organization but also leading it. Thank you Michael!

We introduced our members to some of our new ventures in the area of social media during last year's AGM. The association continues to grow its online presence and is pleased to announce that we have added Facebook (see page 12).

Should you have questions regarding any of these items, don't hesitate to contact me for more information or assistance.

You probably know but I will remind you again that our Annual General Meeting will take place on May 26 at the Marsh Street Centre, Clarksburg. In addition to the regular business portion of the meeting between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m., we have created a new format and have invited a special Guest Speaker for the public portion of the meeting, which will start, right after the closed members-only session at 10:15 am. We also will be joined by Dan Skelton of the Blue Mountains Resort with a news update.

Announcements and a “meet-and-greet” session with light refreshments will follow the formal programs. We hope that some members of Council will be available during the meet-and-greet to discuss

Continued on next page

INFOLINE: 211

Need help? Got a question?

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INFOLINE at 211

anytime – day or night!

STA problems continue – Council just doesn't get it!

By the BMRA- STA Committee

Was anyone who lives in The Blue Mountains surprised by the 5.5% decrease in the number of full-time, permanent residents between the 2006 and the 2011 as revealed by the Census? Of course not! For the past half dozen years, residents have watched as friends and neighbours moved out in frustration resulting from the the Town's slow progress in addressing the issue of Short Term Accommodations.

The problems have become more intolerable over the years as STA businesses continued to aggressively market their product to larger groups, and increased the number of locations.

While some progress has been made, such as changing the town's Official Plan and implementing By-laws to designate areas where STAs can operate, the job is **NOT** finished. This was only the first step.

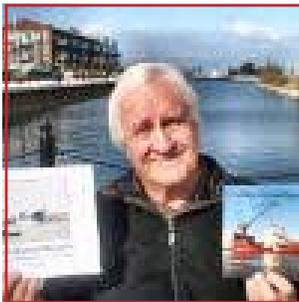
Since then, however, there has been no improvement in the quality of life for the residents living in the vicinity of an STA, and probably it won't improve until an STA Registry and Licensing Regime is implemented.

Vice-President's Report

Continued from page 2

your municipal questions.

This year, the BMRA is pleased to have Mr. George Czerny as our inaugural Guest Speaker. George has extensive knowledge, understanding and vision of the key challenges facing our community



George Czerny

and the surrounding areas. He is a former publisher of the *Enterprise-Bulletin*, former president of the Collingwood Rotary Club, past president of the Collingwood Chamber of Commerce, author of a travel guide – “George's Georgian Bay” – and author of two recent

books on the Collingwood Shipyards. George continues to operate the Georgian Bed and Breakfast in Craighleith and is well-known for coining the phrase “Georgian Triangle.”

Make sure you plan to attend the meeting, especially to hear George's presentation.

We look forward to a great turnout. If you are a member you don't want to miss this event. If you are not a member, come and join at the door.

The purpose of this article is not to rehash the history of STAs, delve into the multitude of problems and complaints, or to promote the merits of a Registration/Licensing program. Instead, it is to make the case in business terms as to why implementing a successful solution to this STA issue as quickly as possible should be a “top priority” for our Council.

Consider for a moment that a municipality is a business and that it competes with other similar municipalities for expanded growth in population and jobs, economic growth, and improved prosperity.

Strategy and focus

The Blue Mountains' stated strategy and focus in advertising and economic development goes even further, as follows (*Red Hot & Blue – page 1*): “Our future is about more than jobs, dollars and growth. It is about making a home for present generations and preparing a place for those of the future. It is about young families finding new opportunities and retirees finding a wonderful lifestyle. It is about understanding the immense economic value of protecting our natural environment and preserving the rural and agricultural sectors.”

The product that most municipalities, including the Blue Mountains, is selling is a lifestyle or “customer experience.”

Businesses need to be flexible, listen to their customers, and be quick to take ownership of problems. Brand loyalty and aggressive advertising can only buy them a small window of opportunity within which to respond.

For example...

An easily identifiable case in point is a comparison of the two companies, APPLE and RIM. They were marketing similar products. One focused on ensuring that its product met or exceeded customer expectations while the other depended on brand loyalty and past performance.

When problems arise, businesses have to be responsive and make sure that they continue to deliver on their core business. If that means investing in R&D and customer service in order to fix problems, and putting special projects and distractions on hold, so be it. RIM was too slow to respond and, once it lost credibility with its customers (i.e., ineffective response to problems, delays/missed targets, and an out-of-touch executive), there was no stemming the mass exodus to the competition's product.

How does this example relate to our community, The Blue Mountains?

Nowhere in our advertising, development strategy documents or objectives does it mention “Party Central” or “Vegas North” as a sustainable goal to enhance the quality of life of the residents or the greater community. People may initially buy into the

See STA problems, next page

Closed municipal meetings – are they really necessary?

By Michael P. Seguin

This article is written as a follow-up to Paul Mitchell's *Letter to the Editor* in our February, 2012 *Newsletter*. Paul clearly pointed out that there were 26 closed Council meetings in 2011 – far too many secret meetings. Well, 2012 has started out with more secrets: of nine Council meetings (as of April 11), five had had closed-sessions.

All municipal Councils or local boards are required to hold meetings that are open to the public, subject to some exemptions. A meeting may be closed for the following reasons:

- For the security of the property of the municipality or local board; personal matters about an identifiable individual, including municipal or local board employees; a proposed or pending acquisition or disposition of land by the municipality or local

STA problems

Continued from page 3

idea that this community is a great place to live but in reality, if the product doesn't deliver and promises of improvement aren't kept, they become disillusioned and start looking around for another option.

Our loss is another community's gain.

A lot of time, money and energy has been invested in this community in support of the Town's stated vision for growth. For example, more builders are adjusting their product to better meet the needs of young families and seniors by offering smaller, more affordable homes; the Village has introduced more family-oriented four-season activities. Residents are excited and supportive of these developments.

There is a place for everyone in our plans – including appropriately located, well managed, and properly licensed STA establishments.

A message to Council:

It is imperative from a customer/resident satisfaction perspective to solve this long festering problem with STAs. Not to do so on a priority basis will damage your credibility with the residents you were elected to serve by appearing to be ineffective and out-of-touch. If the municipal budget has been stretched to the limit, perhaps it is time to take a hard look at all the proposed new initiatives, "special" projects, and "non-core" activities with the objective of deferring those that can wait another year. Then, approve the necessary funding required to implement an STA Registry/Licensing Regime on a priority basis.

This is your opportunity to do the right thing.

board; labour relations or employee negotiations; litigation or potential litigation, including matters before administrative tribunals, affecting the municipality or local board; advice that is subject to solicitor-client privilege, including communications necessary for that purpose; a matter in respect of which a council, board, committee or other body may hold a closed meeting under another Act.

- For the purpose of educating or training the members, so long as no member discusses or otherwise deals with any matter during the closed meeting in a way that materially advances the business or decision-making of the council, local board or committee.

- If the subject matter relates to the consideration of a request under the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, if the council, board, commission or other body is the head of an institution for the purposes of that Act.

Why meetings were closed

In 2011, 65% of the closed meetings were considered staff-related (personal matters about an identifiable individual), while three of the five closed meetings in 2012 pertained to "an identifiable individual" and two involved pending acquisitions. No details of the subject matter were released.

Before a closed meeting may be held, a council, local board or committee must pass a resolution at a public meeting indicating the reasons for holding a closed meeting, plus the general nature of the matter(s) to be dealt with. The resolution should give as much detail as is reasonable without disclosing information that would be detrimental to the municipality or to the interests of others discussed at the closed meeting. This is an issue of transparency.

Insufficient details

Remember, closed meetings should be the exception to holding all meetings in public and in the resolution the reasons must be clear and all-inclusive. In my opinion, compared to other municipalities, such as Collingwood, this Council has failed to provide sufficient detail regarding the nature of the subject matter.

As with public meetings, minutes are required of all meetings of council, local boards and committees. These minutes cannot be taken by a member of the council. The Municipal Act requires that minutes of meetings, open and closed, be taken by the clerk, or designate in the case of a meeting of council, and by the appropriate staff person in the case of a local board or committee, presumably trained by the clerk.

We don't know if minutes are being taken at our closed sessions because there is no indication that they are. In my opinion any closed session should be shown as a separate meeting and the minutes should always be approved separately at the next meeting of

Council. Then we know that they exist and there would be some sense of transparency.

Any person or corporation may ask for an investigation relating to a closed meeting. If a municipality has appointed an investigator, he or she will investigate complaints about closed meetings. If the municipality has not appointed an investigator, the Ontario Ombudsman may investigate.

The investigation provisions apply to meetings held on or after Jan. 1, 2008. The investigative powers set out in the Ombudsman Act – including the power to issue summonses, inspect premises and compel municipal officials and staff to provide information and documents – apply to investigations of closed meeting complaints.

Interestingly, the Town's CAO, Troy Speck, has advised our Association that if we "feel any matter on a closed meeting agenda is there inappropriately" then we can call the Town's closed meeting investigator, Jason Hagan (416-971-9856 ext. 320), at LAS Local Authority Services in Toronto. That's quite a statement by our CAO when he knows that no one can publicly discuss what happened behind closed doors, especially if they are facing some sort of censure.

In summary, both members of council and staff need to ask regularly whether a closed meeting is necessary. The closed meeting is the exception; the public meeting is the rule. Municipal councils are elected and ultimately responsible to their electorate for the decisions they make and the actions they take.

Having said all that: *"Do you trust that the Council of The Blue Mountains is following the spirit of the law with respect to closed-door meetings?"*

This should make for an interesting question in the next municipal election (2014). We already know where this Mayor and Council stand.

References and related policies: *Municipal Act, 2001 as amended; Ombudsman Ontario; Conventional Wisdom Does Not Apply – Amberley Gavel Ltd.*

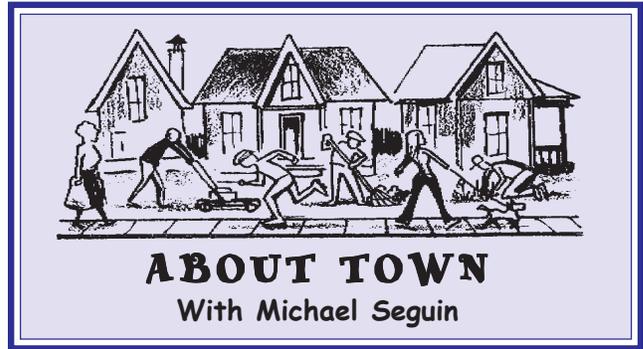
Craigleith Community Centre

- Restored 1860s one-room schoolhouse
 - Designated as a heritage building
 - Includes kitchen facilities

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Terrasan is bankrupt!

REMEMBER THOSE grandiose plans to build a new "gateway" village community in the Craigleith area on the north side of Highway 26, west of Long Point Road and east of Blue Mountain Drive? Under OPA 20 for The Blue Mountains, the Craigleith Village Community was OMB-approved for a mixed use development that would consist of 39 single family detached lots, 112 attached houses, 60 residential apartments above commercial spaces, 72,495 sq. ft. of commercial and 22,475 sq. ft. of institutional space on 13.65 hectares of developable lands.

The development process started way back in 2006 with a land assembly that included the former Easter Seals Camp (\$4-million), the Craigleith General Store, the Blue Mountain Lodge, the Alphorn Restaurant and a former gas bar. In 2008, the first development application was submitted requesting a higher density of 134 condo townhouses and bungalows, 40 live/works apartment units (apartments above retail), and a five-storey senior's residence containing 130 units, together with a large commercial component.

Six years later – the field of schemes has turned into a field of dreams. The property is held in receivership by Meridian Credit Union and is currently being offered under Power of Sale at \$13.5 million (about \$217,742 per gross acre, or \$400,237 per net developable acre).

WOW! What are they drinking?

I note that the MLS listing doesn't even mention the approved development – only that the "draft plan approval process is underway." I'm sure there will be prospective purchasers with deep pockets who will want and wait for a higher density development that will further compromise the wetlands and the waterfront, and cause considerable concern to the many residents who still live in the surrounding community. Stay tuned.

Source: Numerous sources, plus OMB PL101270, Feb. 18, 2011

The old Town Hall is coming down

ON MARCH 26, Council approved a tender bid of \$49,662.37, submitted by McGowan Construction, for the demolition, removal of debris (inclusive of

tipping fees) and site restoration of the old Town Hall. The work is to be completed by the end of April.

Mayor Anderson's so-called "money pit" is about to be turned into an expensive garden and view of the Beaver River. Her reliable Council supporters, McKinlay and McKean, made sure the vote was in their favour. Gamble and Ardiel were opposed, saying "the town should find some use for the building instead of demolishing it." (I've been saying that since the election in 2010!)

The Director of Building and Planning, David Finbow, had estimated the costs in the 2012 budget to be in the \$125,000 range, so the approved bid saved us \$75,337.63, to be buried in the town's surplus slush fund or to be secretly used for the town's other desired and non-public initiatives.

What about an STA Registry Program?

Sources: *Town Report PL.12.39, and Courier-Herald 03/28/2012*

Tomahawk – No more free putts

THE TOWN has decided that user-fees are the best way to ensure sustainability of its pitch-and-putt golf course. With usage far exceeding the courses' capabilities and a significant decrease in donations, operational costs in 2011 exceeded revenues by more than \$100,000 (excluding land costs or capital expenditures). The town wants to continue maintaining Tomahawk as a free youth facility but will charge adults and high school graduates a \$5 green fee on the "honour system." Corporate sponsors will also be encouraged.

The Town has also agreed to invest \$1,000 to install a video surveillance camera at the entrance to encourage people to pay their \$5 fee, to help provide a more accurate count of users and time of use, and to help prevent vandalism and abuse.

I know there are many avid golfers and families in our community who are very supportive of this facility. I agree with Erika Engel's recent editorial in the *Courier-Herald* that users, no matter where they are from, "will have to prove the facility's value by putting their money where their balls are." The golf course opened April 15th, so enjoy – and don't forget to pay your \$5 fee.

Source: *Courier-Herald 28/03/2012 and 04/04/2012*

Grey County continues to investigate single tier municipal government

IS GREY COUNTY Council nuts? Talk about more bureaucracy – a Governance Task Force wants to submit a work plan to council on May 1 asking for permission to prepare a discussion paper on several municipal restructuring options, including: further lower tier amalgamations; single-tier county government; upper tier amalgamations (county-to-county); and, continuing the status quo.

Why are we wasting taxpayer's money on make-

work projects that will go nowhere? I must admit there is an appetite by many municipal councillors, including a few in The Blue Mountains, to eliminate the county (which, interestingly, is not an option in the discussion paper and/or is being ignored).

The task force should stick to its mandate and spend more time and energy on governance issues that create efficiencies and reduce County costs, such as the Warden's term, the composition and size of County Council, and the county's committee system.

But this type of thinking at County Council level doesn't surprise me. This is no different than a County staff recommendation that Council seriously consider the construction of a new \$14 million administration building to support the future growth of bureaucracy (administration and provincial offenses space).

Is there a connection between the idea of a single tier county government and a new administration building?

Source: *Simcoe.com 04/09/2012*

For your pleasure and education

TWO LECTURES remain on the Craigleith Heritage Depot Series Schedule, to be held at the Beaver Valley Community Centre in Thornbury at 1 p.m. (for dates, see below). Admission is \$7 per person, \$10 per couple and \$2 for youths 18 years old and under. For more information call 705-444-2601:

May 28: "To the Outskirts in Habitable Creation: North America's Political Prisoners in Van Diemen's Land

Share the road . . . we're on it together

Cycling today is evolving from an occasional recreational activity to an obsession with health, fitness, fun, the environment and transportation. The Blue Mountains has great scenery, fresh air, interesting destinations and vistas and an extensive road system for traveling by bicycle.

If you participate in this activity, remember that cyclists, motorists, agricultural equipment operators, horses and riders and pedestrians often share the same road. Do your part by being a good ambassador for bicycling: drive with care and courtesy – it's easy to share the road!

For more information, please visit The Blue Mountains Website at: www.thebluemountains.ca/share-the-road.cfm.



penal System During the 1840s,” by Dr. John Carter.
June 25: “Feasting and Fasting: Canada’s Heritage celebrations,” by Dr. Dorothy Duncan.

Real Estate News:

Where is our real estate heading?

ACCORDING to the Editor of *On the Bay* magazine (an excellent publication, by the way), many realtors in the Georgian Bay market area who were interviewed say that the current and near future market is “bright, buoyant, positive, stable and growing.” What else would they say? Their job is to stir excitement in the market, not to put it down!

What does the Georgian Triangle Real Estate Board say? According to their MLS statistics, there were 403 sales in the first quarter of 2012 compared to 347 during the same period in 2011, representing a 16% gain. However, this increase represented only a 6.4% increase in dollar sales volume. The breakdown by price: 209 sales below \$250,000 (12.3% increase over 2011); 154 sales between \$250,000 and \$499,000 (30.5% increase over 2011); and 40 sales over \$500,000 (compared to 43 in 2011).

In terms of location, Grey Highlands and Collingwood showed the greatest increase over 2011 at 61.1% and 45.3%, respectively. In The Blue Mountains, residential sales went virtually unchanged from the first quarter of 2011. Does this surprise anyone! More interestingly: Meaford saw a 5.3% decline in the first quarter of 2012.

So where is the real estate market heading? The Real Estate Board says that “market conditions are expected to remain stable in the second quarter of 2102.” Well, that sounds like some of the realtors interviewed in the magazine are on the same page as the Board.

The realtors, who are betting on a “bright, buoyant, positive and growing” market, are relying on baby boomers to continue investing and retiring in our communities because of the amenities and quality of life offered by Georgian Bay’s four-season recreational lifestyle. While the permanent population base in such communities as Collingwood and Wasaga Beach is continuing to grow, The Blue Mountains has seen a 5.5% decline in permanent population over the period 2006-2011 – it may be “a great investment” and “a great place to visit” but is it a great place to live?

Sources: *Simcoe.com* 11/04/2012 and the Spring issue of *On the Bay* magazine

Please pass it on . . .

When you have finished reading this newsletter, please pass it on to your neighbours and encourage them to join our association!

QUICK HITS:

Blue Mountain News:

■ Four people made the 2011 Sunshine List: **Robert Cummings**, Director of Finance and Information Technology, at \$107,143; **David Finbow**, Director of Planning and Building, at \$133,262; **Reg Russwurm**, Director of Engineering and Public Works, at \$120,967 and former CAO **Paul Graham** at \$111,743 (this must have been his payout). The current CAO, Troy Speck will certainly exceed \$111,743 in 2012. While we’re on the money, the Mayor was paid \$41,931.22, while the Councilors were paid an average of \$30,000, which included salaries, per diems, benefits, travel allowances, professional development, cell phones, etc. The total payout for our 2011 Council was \$229,806.62.

■ Four local volunteers are being honoured this year (May 6th) with an *Order of the Blue Mountains*: **Diane Tarr** – Order of Community Service for her involvement in many local charities; **Brian Adamson** – Order of Friend of the Blue Mountains for his involvement in bringing the Health Centre to our community; **Natalee McGirr** – Youth Citizen Award for her many volunteer services; **James McKinlay** and family – Order of the Environment Award for their involvement in developing farming practices that improve the local environment and help grow safe food products. Congratulations to all!

■ One of the Town’s favorite events has been cancelled this year: the Chili Cookoff. The Thornbury-Clarksburg Rotary Club, which has hosted the event for the last 27 years, needs time to re-think their position and the cost-benefits in continuing for subsequent years.

■ “Windfall”, a project proposing 609 single and semi-detached residential units along the north side of County Road 19 and west of County Road 21, has received draft approval. The first phase (37 units) is being marketed and construction is expected to start in September. Development will only proceed, however, when trunk line sewers have been extended south along County Road 21 from Highway 26.

■ In February, Jim Farmilo was elected for a two-year term as the new President of The Blue Mountains Chamber of Commerce. Jim is seeking sustainability through defining the Chamber’s mandate and trying to work together with similar organizations in overcoming overlapping economic interests, responsibilities and requests for the same financial support. Good luck Jim.

Collingwood news:

■ After “flip-flopping” by various Councils over a Heritage designation and building height, after looking at a large hole in the ground for many years and after a large rally by residents of the community, the proposed six-storey Admiral Collingwood Place is

awaiting its final approval hurdle: Simcoe County Council ratification of the corporate services committee awaiting a 20-day appeal period, which should be completed by May 31.

■ Council lets CAO Kim Wingrove go “without cause” – or at least nobody is saying what happened. Ms. Wingrove came to the Town with extensive business qualifications having been chosen from more than 200 applicants about three years ago. Taxpayers will be demanding answers.

■ MTO is saying that the new four-lane Highway 26 Bypass will be delayed at least another year until a five-lane connection is completed into Collingwood.

■ Developer John Di Poce has donated 10 acres of land to the Collingwood General and Marine Hospital for construction of a future hospital. The site is located on the north-east corner of Sixth Line and Poplar Sideroad, opposite the new Georgian College Campus. The hospital will need substantial capital funding and Ministry of Health and Long-term Care approval before proceeding. The new and expanded facility is necessitated by physical limitations of their existing location and increased demand by the increasing population, especially retirees and an enormous influx of tourists.

■ In February, the Collingwood Shipyard developers, Slokker Canada, advised that they were looking for another builder/investor with “more energy” to accelerate the development of two parcels (3.96 acres) of their project. The site was targeted for a three storey condominium building and townhouses (a substantial portion of the 600 units still permitted on the 35 acres project site).

■ For classical music lovers, MZ Media Inc., the operators of Classical 96.3 in Toronto and Classical 103.1 in Cobourg, have been granted a license to operate a radio station in the Collingwood area. They hope to turn on the music as soon as they have their station frequency. State tuned!



ENVIRONMENTAL PEER REVIEWS –

The need for independence

By Don Kerr

Director, Blue Mountain
Watershed Trust Foundation

When a municipality receives an application for a development that may cause harm to natural areas, the Planning Act requires that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be prepared by the developer to ensure that there will be no negative impacts on the natural features, or their functions, as a result. The developer will employ a consultant to perform the study.

Since much of the determination of harm is a matter of opinion and judgment, the owner's consultant will tend to err on the side of the developer. Consequently, most municipalities engage a peer reviewer to assess the reliability of the EIS results and to make their own judgments.

Municipalities vary in their approach to peer reviews. The Town of Collingwood utilizes the Conservation Authority (CA) exclusively to do the reviews and they find this approach to be excellent.

In most such cases, The Blue Mountains, supported by the County of Grey, retains a private peer reviewer for environmental matters. They also receive comments on natural heritage issues from the CA and, where applicable, the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC). *They must consider these comments but are not obliged to accept them, however.*

The Municipality of Grey Highlands usually adopts a similar approach. In our experience, the private peer reviewer who is retained by the Town in these cases consistently recommends environmental protection which is less stringent than the independent agencies, that is, the CA or the NEC. Why do the various peer reviewers have such different opinions? Why do they make judgments that are more lenient to development rather than ensuring environmental integrity?

Peer reviewers for the Town and the County invariably are more conscious of the desires of their clients (and perhaps also to the developers to whom their costs are generally charged back). Protection of the environment is not entirely a science-based activity. This is clearly evident when one observes

Emergency & Information

Immediate response: 911 (Do not call unless it's an emergency or you will be assessed a response charge of \$300)

OPP (Collingwood & Blue Mountains): 1-888-310-1122; (Administration): 705-445-4321. Blue Mountains Resorts Security: 705-445-0231 x8281/8911 (24 hours)

Fire Department: Thornbury Fire Station # 1, (519) 599-5411; Craighleith Fire Station #2, (705) 444-2244

Municipal Offices: Thornbury (519) 599-3131. Troy Speck, Chief Administration Officer, x234; Robert Cummings, Treasurer, x245; Corinna Giles, Town Clerk, x232; David Finbow, Director of Planning and Building x246; Reg Russwurm, Director of Engineering, x260.

the range of opinions and judgments reached by the developers' consultants and the various other consultants *based on the same facts*.

That is why the Watershed Trust (BMWTF) strongly supports the use of *impartial* independent agencies, such as the CA and NEC, to provide the environmental peer reviews.

Therefore, the BMWTF has recommended to The Blue Mountains, Grey Highlands and the County of Grey that they discontinue the engagement of their own peer reviewers and utilize exclusively the Conservation Authority and where applicable, the NEC, for environmental peer reviews for the following reasons:

1. The CA and NEC are independent agencies charged with protection of the environment from inappropriate development and site alteration and are not compromised by other priorities;
2. When making judgments, the private reviewer will be conscious of the perceived desires of the client.

3. It is the duty of the municipality, and not the peer reviewer, to make any necessary compromises between the objectives of development and environmental protection.

4. It is a waste of scarce resources to duplicate peer reviews when we have capable independent agencies at our disposal; and

5. The municipality should strongly support a fully-funded Conservation Authority in these times when natural habitats are under serious threat and many species are at risk.

■ Note: The BMWTF is an independent grass-roots and volunteer organization with more than 140 members. It is committed to ensuring the continued environmental health and integrity of our watersheds. The BMWTF mission statement is to "preserve and enhance the Blue Mountain Watershed Ecosystem." The BMRA supports the mission statement and goals of this organization and wishes to share their thoughts on current developments and the threats and issues facing watersheds in the Blue Mountains.)

Finding homes for Furry Friends

Furry Friends (Collingwood) is a charitable animal rescue organization made up of dedicated, hardworking volunteers who serve many municipalities within the Georgian Triangle, including The Blue Mountains.

If you are an animal lover of any kind, you can appreciate the fact that they actually go out and rescue injured, sick and neglected animals, including wildlife (they have a no-kill policy).* They do everything possible to provide health care for these unwanted and needy animals and then find them a new and caring home.

Unfortunately, Furry Friends does not have a shelter and must use foster homes for rescue animals until they are adopted into loving, forever homes. To raise much needed funds to care for these animals, a weekend store called the *Bizarre BAZAAR* was opened at Diane's Garden on Hwy. 24, opposite the bowling alley in Collingwood. It is open from May to September. The store is stocked with good, saleable items which have been donated by caring volunteers and generous patrons in the Georgian Bay area.

All proceeds from the store and various yard sales/bazaars are used to fund medical/vet care, food and litter.

The *Bizarre BAZAAR* will open Friday May 18 and every Friday, Saturday and Sunday between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. until September. A Spring Bazaar and Yard Sale is to be held on Saturday, May 5 at Diane's Garden between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Donations for this yard sale will be accepted on Friday, May 4 at Diane's Garden from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

If you can volunteer, donate or just show your support, call Dori at 705-444-7208.

The needy, homeless animals of the Georgian Bay area really need your caring help and support! Show the many dedicated volunteers in The Blue Mountains that you care by donating and shopping at Furry Friends' fundraising yard sales and the Bizarre Bazaar.

* The Georgian Triangle Humane Society (GTHS) does not do rescue work.



Furry Friends (Collingwood)

Doing ANIMAL RESCUE in Georgian Triangle

SPRING BAZAAR & YARD SALE



Saturday, May 5th, 2012

at Diane's Garden

(Highway 24, Collingwood)

8:00 a.m. to 6 p.m.

We're adding to our communications capabilities

By Lester Posen

There comes a time when you begin to understand how your parents felt as they aged and the world appeared to move forward at an increasing pace. Throughout our lives we become accustomed to a certain speed or pace: we take it in, learn and accept information. This information can be items that we need in our everyday lives: from the understanding of services from our town, telephone and utility companies to those places where we buy our necessities.

Thanks to the technological revolution, the method and speed with which we communicate have been changing and moving faster for the past few decades.

Staying in touch with family, friends and peers is a strong driver in the use of technology. We all live involved, high-speed and regionally-dispersed lives. Enter our smart phones, tablets and computers. These devices are the tools that we use to connect with the outside world – in some cases to the exclusion of face-to-face conversation!

These devices are not enough. We must have the right stuff to make these devices “talk” to the parties at both ends of the conversation. This is where we find photo albums, email, instant messaging, LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook.

The BMRA regularly reviews the way we communicate with our members and the community at large. We use the internet via our Web presence, and effectively use email for mass communication with our members and getting out urgent information.

We introduced Twitter to our members at the 2011 Annual General Meeting. Twitter is a fast and efficient way to get urgent information out to a group of “followers.” Signing up for Twitter is free; once you have a Twitter account you can find us at @BLUEMtnRtpyrs. Just click to “follow” the BMRA and every time you sign in to Twitter you will receive information that is regularly broadcast by the BMRA.

The BMRA “follows” several people and organizations and resends or tweets information that is being communicated. This allows you to have a single source of Blue Mountains news that lets you stay in touch. The information provided via each Twitter is called a “tweet” and must be no longer than 140 characters. This is enough for information – but not too much to distract you.

Facebook is the next level of communication. It is a social media item that allows a group of like-interested individuals to communicate back and forth. There is the opportunity to share pictures, events, ideas, successes and challenges.

The BMRA is now on Facebook. This will allow the association to extend its reach and get more information out to the

world. Our presence on Facebook also allows you to communicate easily with the entire membership and the rest of the public with your ideas, views and thoughts on all matters in The Blue Mountains.

Many times we don't feel like sitting down and crafting an email. However, we will spend a moment to write a note to a loved one. Facebook is the medium that will allow our “family” to stay in touch and drive the social action that we need in The Blue Mountains – “Protecting the Interests of the Community.”



www.bluemountainratepayers.ca

Have you visited our Website? It reports on lots of good stuff, including informative articles about your community and other other info and ideas you should be aware of, such as: art and cultural associations, maps, news media, attractions in and around the town, service clubs, ski areas and lots more. Check it out!

FINAL NOTICE FOR 2012 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Our records show that some members have still not renewed their 2012 Family Membership. If you are one of them, remember that your membership is very important to us. It enables us to publish our *Newsletter* on a quarterly basis, to provide for an Annual General Meeting every spring and, most of all, to maintain our Website so that we can reach out to as many people as possible on an on-going basis.

If you have forgotten or misplaced your application form, you can obtain one at bluemountainratepayers.ca, under Join, Become a Member.

If you choose not to renew for any reason, then we will remove your name(s) from our mailing list shortly after the AGM, scheduled for Saturday May 26. Thank-you for your past support.

If you have any questions regarding your renewal, please contact Michael P. Seguin at 519-599-7179 or mpseguin@rogers.com.