



Electronic-Newsletter

SPRING EDITION **APRIL, 2013**

Welcome to this edition of the BMRA News. This newsletter is brought to you by the Communications Team and is meant to give you the latest news and information affecting the ratepayers of The Blue Mountains. (Point to an Article in Contents and click.)

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ARTICLE 1 – PRESIDENT’S REPORT

Mid-term and the need for a municipal election

By Michael P. Seguin

We’ve just past the mid-way mark of this Council’s 4-year term and many people are already starting to think about the next municipal election in October, 2014 (only 19 months away, if you’re counting). Why? Are people disgruntled, disturbed and/or just fed-up with the lack of leadership of this Council in not being more proactive and receptive to the more important needs and the economic realities of the community? Or are people just tired of being ignored and being given “lip service” every time they express their concerns at Public Meetings – which I do believe are considered just mere gestures to the public to make it appear like an open and transparent process?



For the past two years of this Council’s term, I’ve been going to all Council Meetings (and many more before that) and I can’t remember too many memorable moments. In fact, many Council meetings have been outright boring, predictable and very disappointing, with the triumvirate of Anderson, McKinlay and McKean always voting together (en block) and only requiring one more vote to support their Agendas. It appears that the controversial issues are generally reserved for “closed” meetings, where everyone is sworn to secrecy – how convenient. There were 28 Council meetings in 2012, of which 18 or 65% of these meetings included “closed meetings”. Apparently, I’m not alone in my suspicions as the residents of Collingwood and Meaford are also questioning the number of “closed meetings” and calling for more open and transparent councils? You can read more about my opinion on the “Transparency Gap” in the April, 2012 Newsletter posted on the BMRA website.

Over the past two years, there have been many predictable decisions, including the last “don’t debate, don’t discuss and don’t listen” 2013 budget process, where this Council basically ignored the general public concerns. It appears that years of service and experience no longer add up to good leadership, good governance and finding workable solutions. In my opinion, this Council strikes me as a group that is tired, out-dated and out-of touch with the challenging issues before them and are continuing to lose the support of the public.

No doubt, this Council will totally disagree with me and feel that they should be rewarded for their efforts. In fact, at the March 19th Infrastructure and Recreation meeting, Councilor Ardiel, supported by Councilor Gamble, directed staff to investigate the “remuneration and expenses” of Council members in surrounding municipalities to determine if a raise was in order (since there was none since 2006). Councilor McKean voted against this proposal knowing that this “staff work project” would only lead to a great debate at budget time (remember, the consultant’s “pay-equity” proposal was a slam-dunk).

Although, we are only at the mid-term of this Council’s term, I do believe that the time has come to consider preparing for the next municipal election in 2014 and focus on a new Council. The community needs to find candidates, who care more about good governance than the money, and who can provide more open and transparent leadership and find more workable and affordable solutions to community needs. For those interested in taking a run at a Blue Mountain council seat in the 2014 municipal election, they should really get to work now on their campaign. The expectation that “I will learn on the job” doesn’t work anymore. You need to start getting familiar with the various policies and procedures that govern meetings, understand the

issues and be prepared to provide a strong voice at the council table. That may sound like a “tall-order” but the BMRA is interested in helping members and is planning to set up an Election Committee to help future candidates gain knowledge and understanding of the process as they move forward to nomination day in January, 2014.

In other news, the Draft Short Term Accommodation (STA) By-law Public Meeting is scheduled for April 15th, 2013 at 7.00 p.m. in the Council Chambers at the Town Hall. I cannot emphasize how important this meeting is, to many of our members. We need to provide a strong voice in reminding this Council of the huge investment in terms of cost to the taxpayers, the favourable OMB and judicial decisions and more importantly, their commitment to move forward with licencing STA businesses in low density single family residential areas. The STA Licencing By-law is necessary to ensure compatibility in these residential areas and avoid serious conflicts, as well as ensure the health and safety of the travelling public. You can help by either writing comments in advance of the meeting or by simply coming to the meeting (further details can be found in the announcement box at the end of the newsletter).

On April 8th, 2013, the Town is holding a Special Meeting of Council to hear the OPP Deputy Commissioners present various proposals for a new 5 year OPP Contract as well as provide a comparison to the Section 5.1 “pay-as-you-go” alternative. As we advised you in the last newsletter, over 15% of the Town’s operating budget is due to OPP costs (>\$2.3 million) and is expected to rise substantially if left unchecked. Members of the Budget Review Committee have provided an update in this newsletter, but I suggest that you try to attend this meeting and determine for yourself the direction that best serves this community.

On May 4th, 2013, the BMRA will hold it’s AGM in the auditorium at the Marsh Street Centre in Clarksburg. We want you to come around 8.30 a.m. for coffee and cookies, followed by a members-only business portion at 9.00 a.m. and questions from the floor. After a short break (more coffee and cookies), our guest program will begin at 10.15 a.m. with Grey County CAO, Lance Thurston, providing us a close look at what value the Town receives for its (or our) \$13 million tax contribution. Warden Deputy Mayor Duncan McKinlay will provide a brief political viewpoint followed by a short question answer period. We will conclude our meeting with a brief but important update on present and future resort activities (including the Orchard expansion) by Dan Skelton, COO of the Blue Mountain Resorts followed by a short “meet and greet” session.

My rating of Council’s performance for the first quarter of 2013 has dropped to a: **D**

This is based on ignoring the economic realities impacting taxpayers and “ramming” through a 6.31% Town tax levy, and widening the “Transparency Gap” by continuing to have frequent “closed meetings”, approving the poorly planned and undesirable “Adult-Lifestyle” Telfer Land Lease Development and approving a “banker-style” Town Non-Profit Housing Corporation and Land Lease Plan.

If you have any comments regarding my statements in this report and throughout the newsletter, please do not hesitate to contact me through the web site (info@bluemountainratepayers.ca) or send me a message via the Association’s mailing address.

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

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ARTICLE 2 – AGM ANNOUNCEMENT

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 4th, 2013 at 9.00 a.m.

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 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, 2012;
3. Election of Board Directors;
4. Proposed Amendments to the Bylaws;
5. Transacting any other business presented at the meeting;
6. Question and answer period.

By Order of the Board, January 12, 2013

Michael P. Seguin, President

Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association

ARTICLE 3 – WE'RE OVER GOVERNED

We're Over-Governed

By Ritchie Baird and John Leckie, members of BMRA Budget Review Committee

When we met the CAO of Grey County Lance Thurston (see Ad below) to discuss his presentation we were pleasantly surprised by his candor and grasp of the issues facing our community. We're sure you will be too. The following information is offered as a background primer to his presentation.

Fact over Fiction

A recent Fraser Institute report states that federal, provincial and local government employees in Ontario earned 13.9% more than their private sector counterparts, they are three times more likely to have pension plans, and are far less likely to get fired.

Every province in the country is running deficits now; even the largest so-called "have" provinces. Suddenly the projected deficit of Canada's richest province is leaving dumbstruck Albertans looking at a deficit of \$4 billion.

During the 9 years of the McGuinty government deficits have piled up debt from about \$130 to \$260 billion and still climbing. In February Maclean's headlined an article "Deadbeat Nation" that stated: ONTARIO's Deficit for fiscal 2012-13: \$11.9 billion. Provincial debt rating downgraded last year. Chance of default within 30 years: 79.3%.

If all the Provinces are in this deficit/debt quagmire then how is "Equalization" supposed to work? Instead of sharing Provincial wealth in our federation do we now share the debt? That begs the question: How is "Equalization" within the County supposed to work when a tiny Town like TBM is facing massive infrastructure spending such as the looming \$8 million Landfill project? Is there a better way to govern ourselves and possibly get some returns to scale that businesses are always striving for?

Like it or not we're in a global economy. Toronto's new Economic Strategy document refers to the McKinsey Global Institute called *Mapping the economic power of cities*. They have noted that "about 20% of the world population located in 600 urban centres generate 60% of total global GDP. But the makeup of the group of top 600 cities will keep changing. Successful cities will be those that can work more collaboratively to develop new approaches that will create an environment that will assist its firms and citizens to adapt and thrive in constantly changing economic realities."

That brings to mind why we in TBM should consider some form of consolidation. Small towns simply don't have the wealth-creation ability of large cities; it's entirely unfair and illogical for Queen's Park to demand that not merely our service requirements but also our ability to pay must be on the same level as large cities. Specifically, we are getting pressure from Queen's Park for TBM to build a complex and expansive infrastructure item like the \$ 8 million Waste Management landfill project; to do this we might need to consider a re-organization of our governance.

In a Grey County discussion paper in February, 2012 called "Opportunity knows no Boundary" the comment is made "Municipal leaders recognize that the time has come to look beyond their respective municipal boundaries to find sustainable solutions."

Big budget issues like Waste Management is a local not a County service. We asked Lance: why is that? He responded:

"It is my role to point out the issues and suggest that we need to begin the conversation of how to address the challenge. There is a range of options, one of which I have authored, a new Collaborative Decision Making Framework for the county and its municipalities when considering joint service arrangements, like a landfill perhaps."

We're hoping that by the time our AGM rolls around that the County CAO will have

received council approval for his “Collaborative” approach and be able to speak to it.

Meanwhile we’re all realistic enough to understand that given existing power structures that unless the Ratepayers of Grey determine otherwise, it will probably take decades to change our governance. But we don’t have decades because the McKinsey consultants referenced above also say “regions and cities will emerge more successful than previously, others will falter, and a few may fall dramatically”.

There is still time

Nova Scotia Liberal MP Scott Brison believes the Maritime Provinces are a decade away from fiscal calamity. He thinks he knows how to prevent it...some form of Economic Union. “While the decisions may seem difficult now,” he warned, “they will be much easier than the excruciatingly painful ones that will be imposed on us in 10 years.” That same thinking applies to TBM and Grey County, let’s work together to optimize the way we are governed before it becomes “painful”.

The purpose of Grey County’s Strategic Plan states: “committed to the coordinated delivery of responsive and cost-effective services”. The TBM landfill would be a good place to test “collaboration” and to “coordinate” that purpose in order to optimize the Economic Union of the community we share.

We hope the above gives you an enticing sneak preview of what Lance Thurston will be addressing at our AGM May 4th; 10AM ... mark your calendars.

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TBM is a Jewell in Grey County

We are very pleased that **Lance Thurston**, the CAO of Grey County, will be our guest speaker at the BMRA May 4th AGM. Lance’s remarks are addressed to the general public and will commence following our 10AM Break.

His topic will deal with the value received for the Town’s contribution of \$13 million to the County representing 42% of our aggregate tax bill covering Town spending. Although TBM only has a population of less than 7000 people in a County of about 90,000, our contribution represents 25% of the County

Budget/Revenues. Compare that to Owen Sound which has a population of 22,000 and sends \$8 million in funding to the County.

As the CAO, Lance will outline “just the facts” for us. Then Deputy Mayor Duncan McKinlay will join Lance during the Q and A as some of the issues are ...well... political.

ARTICLE 4 – MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Membership Report

By Kim Posen

A survey was completed by Léger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies in November 2012. It found that 57% of Ontarians say they follow world news, 45% follow news about Canadian politics and just 37% follow news about provincial politics. There are countless sources for information on world news and politics, from print

media to radio, television and the internet.

Finding out what is happening in The Blue Mountains is limited to the “Official Site of Town of the Blue Mountains” website, local newspapers, and the BMRA. Our membership base is growing, adding over 90 new members for 2013 to date. Overall, approximately 800 receive the BMRA newsletters and email blasts.

During the 2010 Municipal Election, there were 10,569 eligible voters in TBM. Despite the option of a mail in ballot, only 38.8% (4102) of people cast ballots. There were 4 candidates for Mayor, with the incumbent winning with less than 50% of the vote. There were 13 candidates running for Councillor, and as a voter you were entitled to vote for 5. Where do you, as a voter, find credible information allowing you to make an informed decision? Attending an all candidates meeting is not an option for many people. Using the material prepared by the BMRA is a valuable resource, easily accessed.

The goal of increasing membership in the BMRA has the potential to significantly increase informed voter participation in municipal politics, while at the same time holding elected officials accountable for their decisions. Given the historic voter turnout, each vote really does count!

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ARTICLE 5 – OPP CONTRACT AND SECTION 5.1

OPP Contract and Section 5.1 Option Update

By Janet Findlay, Ritchie Baird, John Leckie (members, BMRA Budget Review Committee)

Town Council will soon be asked to consider a 5-year renewal of the OPP police contract (for budget years 2013-2017). The BMRA position is that such a contract might not be in the best interests of the Town at the present time. We don't have enough information to make a judgement call at this time and we are awaiting alternative proposals.

The reason for not getting into a traditionally expensive long term contract is that the economic climate and the fiscal capacity of Ontario and its municipalities face daunting issues. Therefore, governance in the Province is about to change in order to adapt to the times. Under these circumstances, instead of getting locked into a long term contract, the Town should at least consider the option of being charged for actual hours of police service under an agreement known as Section 5.1. To his credit, the Town CAO, Troy Speck, made this one of his suggestions early on in discussions with the BMRA and he presented that information to Council in the spring which should have found its way to the Police Board.

While the new Provincial leadership might prefer to continue to ignore the recommendations of the Drummond Report, it is certainly beginning to look like the Report is gaining traction.

But these matters take time to work themselves through the system. Section 5.1 is a way to delay. Therefore, the Blue Mountains should delay signing expensive long term contracts until the new Queen's Park regime gets some traction on public sector wage and compensation packages that are more in sync with the economy's ability to generate wealth to fund them.

Collingwood OPP officers have agreed to a two-year wage freeze and an 8.5% hike in 2014. Moreover, the contract has a clause guaranteeing them the highest pay of any police force in Ontario at the end of the three-year term. Over the years, the top annual salary for an OPP constable has grown dramatically; in 2011 it was \$117,495, up from \$94,431 in 2004. Small municipalities such as ours cannot afford such high costs for policing.

Mr. Speck has been told that various OPP options and estimates have been completed but that the Deputy Commissioners have not yet signed off on them. We understand that they will be presented on April 8. Let's hope the options are better than the ones presented to Collingwood. Collingwood recently signed a new 5-year contract with the OPP for an increase this year of 5.76%. TBM Policing is linked to Collingwood and we need to avoid these kinds of escalations.

The BMRA would also like Council to consider moving to a five member Police Services Board from the current three members. Wider representation on the Board would improve public representation and allow a better forum for the discussion of costs and services. We also believe the Town should join the Association of Police Boards of Ontario, where it can maintain contact with other municipalities, especially at the rural and small town level, and by being more of a united front we could possibly have some control over the direction of police costs. Together small municipalities can voice their frustration with the provincial government.

We'll conclude with some sympathy for our Councillors and Staff on this issue because it is the provincial government that sets the stage for increases of the OPP salaries. Who must pay? Our citizens! NOT the provincial government! We, at the rural/small town municipal level, are standing on the sidelines with little ability to control the direction of police costs. But we the Ratepayers throughout Ontario also vote for our MPPs. Maybe it's time to bump this challenge up a political notch.

Meanwhile we urge our Councillors to carefully consider all the options and avoid locking us into a long term burdensome contract with the OPP that is out of step with economic realities.

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FINAL NOTICE FOR 2013 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Remember that your membership is very important to us. It allows us to publish our Newsletter, conduct an Annual General Meeting every spring and, most of all, to maintain our Web Site.

See Membership Form on page 20, or go to our website at <http://bit.ly/XmbCzd>

ARTICLE 6 – THE MAILBAG/LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Mailbag

Letter to the Editor from an Editor - George Czerny's View from Blue

George Czerny is a retired journalist and newspaper publisher who now lives in Craigeith. He also was the guest speaker at the 2012 BMRA-AGM.

In a video-screen world, oriented to short bursts of information, our society is weaning itself off reading lengthy, austere (read not sexy) documents.

It's a world where reality shows and entertainment modes of varying sorts over-ride such down-to-earth – but extremely important -- topics as local government and taxes.

Pity!

I used to be vehemently opposed to some ratepayers' groups, as I knew them some 15 and 20 years ago, because of their one-side slants and very narrow-focused actions while purporting to represent an entire municipality.

Councils, as elected in our respective municipalities, were the ones we trusted to do the job of representing us all and doing the best that they could do for us all.

I started covering councils, from tiny Matchedash Township (where other reporters never appeared) to City of Orillia council and Simcoe County council, back in the 1960s. I wrote about every council meeting honestly.

Sometimes, council members assailed me later:

Example: "Why did you have to write that we spent 45 minutes talking about a dead goat found at the dump, and only five minutes approving the construction of a \$2-million-dollar bridge project?"

I could go on and on with examples of how council members reacted to some reports. But, in my view, readers deserved to know exactly what went on at meetings of the council members they had elected.

One thing that never changed – or so it seemed – was that councils, no matter how small, or big, the municipalities appeared dedicated to doing the very best that they could do for their constituents; constituents who were their neighbours, sometimes their friends.

Overall, the municipal council-voter relationship was a matter of trust, even as the province brought in rule after rule and funding change after funding change.

I remember when D'arcy McKeough, then-minister of municipal affairs, brought in zoning bylaws and land-planning became more than a buzzword.

Things continued to change and with those changes – always affecting the taxpayer –

the municipal council world got more and more complicated. As that happened, council terms moved from two years to three and then to four.

The matter of trust continued at the municipal level and – I'll go way out on a limb – at the provincial and federal level too. After all, we elect all politicians to do the very best they can do for all of us.....for the majority.

But that matter of electorate trust seems to be evaporating at many levels of government. And, I have changed my mind about ratepayers' organizations.

Look at what's currently happening in Collingwood, where allegations swirl today. There's no proof that anybody has done anything wrong, but there are people and groups finger-pointing into thin air with accusations that have a very thick and nasty coating if they are proven to be true.

As things have become more and more complicated at the municipal council level, it seems that trust from local resident is a deteriorating thing. Soon, nobody will want to run for council and serve a community in a time-honoured way.

I'm shocked by what's happening, but then again my wife Nancy says that I live in a world where I trust everybody.

But back to ratepayers' group. In the early 1990s I used to belong to the Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association (BMRA) – once called the Craigeith Ratepayers' Association – but I left them when I felt they could not represent all of the ratepayers of the Town of the Blue Mountains (TOBM).

In early 2012, I accepted an invitation to be a guest speaker at the annual meeting of the Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association. I did a lot of research before that meeting and found the mayor, council members, municipal staff, the warden and staff at Grey County and local police representatives to be helpful and open.

In my speech I talked about many, many facts: That Blue Mountains carries 26% of the Grey County levy, that police costs have been dramatically increasing, and many other municipal news-bits for which I had backup information.

The majority of my very-lengthy speech went unreported by the mainstream media. What did get reported was that I urged (in my finale) the BMRA to be constructive in its dealings with council.

I understand that today's print media is understaffed, has limited news-column space and that radio and TV folks have even fewer resources when it comes to covering local news.

I'm happy to report that my thinking about the BMRA changed because of my most-recent dealings and analysis of what the association – thanks to President Michael Seguin – does for our community.

I think that the BMRA is constructive and (full disclosure here) I have paid my \$25 fee and become a member. That got me to thinking about why more taxpayers in Blue Mountains don't belong to the BMRA.

I re-read the February 2013 edition of "The View from Blue", which is the BMRA's occasional newsletter. In eight, black-and-white pages this non-glossy document,

presented 20 stories on local topics ranging from a 22-month plan leading up to the next municipal election, to analysis of what's going on with the accumulation of reserves in the TOBM. Reserves, that equates to money that comes from the taxpayers' pockets. Two other pages carried information about who's who in the BMRA and a membership-encouragement form.

How much in the way of reserves will be enough in the TOBM? Who knows?

Not a sexy topic. No glitter, or colour from a video screen here, just council's hand in your pocket, reaching for your money at a time when it is difficult to find enough money for everyday expenses; especially for people who are on a fixed income.

Pity.

Yes, it's a pity that more people do not involve themselves in following municipal politics on a week-to-week basis.

"The View from Blue": It is not escapism, via small or large screens, from the hurdy-gurdy of the real world.....a real world where a council's ability to pluck tax payments at an ever-increasing rate equates with your financial ability to pay (think of yourself as a ship here) continuing to sink.

There's not a journalist in the Georgian Triangle area who has attended as many TOBM council meetings as BMRA President Michael Seguin. In fact, reportage of TOBM by the mainstream media is sparse compared to what the BMRA churns out to members on the internet and with a printed version of "The View from Blue" placed at selected spots such as L.E. Shore Memorial Library in Thornbury.

"The View from Blue" is nowhere near as sexy as enjoying life in the Georgian Triangle area of southern Georgian Bay. But this newsletter does bring straight-from-the-hip analysis of what's happening with your tax dollars (and mine!) in the TOBM.

This newsletter's stories and editorial comment either explain what is happening, comment on it, or try to pry open what is possibly a Pandora's Box of problems for ratepayers. No other local media does it so well.

"The View from Blue" is written by ratepayers for ratepayers at a time when, like never before, the ability of taxpayers to pay, pay, pay is shrinking, shrinking, shrinking. This newsletter is not written by elitists for elitists. It's written by hard-working individuals who, in some cases, have retired.

They bring a different dimension of caring about our community and our neighbours to the newsletter pages. They know that the taxpayers' ability to pay taxes is not a bottomless pit.

In fact, the BMRA might be ahead of its time in as much as grassroots, ratepayer's organizations are concerned. This kind of government-watch – on the voters' behalf – might become the mainstream.

The BMRA wants TOBM council decisions to be fully explained in an open and accountable way. It encourages difficult decisions to be made and, perhaps, official resistance to be fired back at a provincial government which adds to local expenses.

"The View from Blue" is bland compared to glossy, colourful publications, or TV. But it

offers meaningful material and it doesn't attack your wallet, or purse.

At a time when more and more taxpayers are crying out for more accountability from their councils, the "View from Blue" is a jangling, alarm clock.

Speaking of clocks and time, it will soon be time for the BMRA's annual general meeting. Mark Saturday, May 4 on your calendar and plan to attend this session at the Marsh Street Centre auditorium in Clarksburg.

If you are a TOBM resident, "The View from Blue" is not only an information-filled document that you should read, it is also a reminder that every taxpayer has power: the power to ask questions, expect answers and the power to vote.

When people don't do any of the aforementioned – ask questions, expect answers and vote – it's a pity and things can only get more and more out of hand.

All at our expense.

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ARTICLE 7 – OPINION

Opinion

Does this Town Committee need serious adjustment?

By Michael P. Seguin

Recently, I received an email from members of our Association, who expressed their shocking experience with the Town's Committee of Adjustment. Shortly after bulldozing a 12 year old chalet and clear-cutting a sloping site (without formal or written approval from the NEC), a builder on the adjacent lot had expressed to them that only a minor variance would be required to increase the building envelope for a new house. But, when the Town Notice came, much to their surprise the building envelope was much greater than expected and the construction of a "monster home" was being planned that would impact their light, sightlines and boundary line landscaping.

When our members attended the Committee of Adjustment to express their concerns, the builder was requesting his approvals without the proper site plans and elevations and relied only on a photograph of a house from a magazine. Our members felt intimidated and were overwhelmed by a builder from Collingwood (the advocate), who relied primarily on his experience and reputation – but no appropriate site plans. Our members expressed their concern about the Committee's decision to rule in favour of this advocate, when the evidence was weak at best.

So what's the problem? Are advocates (builders, consultants and owners) being allowed to bully their way through the Committee of Adjustment process without proper plans and/or documentation? Does the Committee provide a fair hearing for members of the public, especially adjacent land owners?

Are these fair questions? Maybe or maybe not – I'm not judging Committee members or their decisions? What really concerns me is that members of our Community felt the

need to reach out for help (after the fact) and tell me, that in their opinion the Committee of Adjustment had made a weak and unfair decision which basically allowed an advocate to ruin “the enjoyment of my house”. Their only request now is that the BMRA bring awareness to the problem and hope that others don’t suffer through the same experience and suffer the same fate.

Important note for the members of the community: If you have any issues going before the Committee of Adjustment that concern you, let us know in advance. We want to make sure that the Town provides fairness and transparency and that advocates such as builders, consultants and aggressive owners, don’t bully their way through the process and “ruin the enjoyment of your home”.

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ARTICLE 8 – STA MEETING ALERT

Draft Short-term Accommodation Licencing By-Law Public Meeting

**This is a very, very
important meeting!!!!**

We are now moving forward into the final stages of a much-needed Short Term Accommodation (STA) Licencing By-law. We need your support to provide a strong voice in showing this Council that **they have public support to license** commercial STA businesses in residential areas in order to provide compatibility and avoid serious conflicts, as well ensure the health and safety of the travelling public.

The Public Meeting is scheduled for April 15th, 2013 at 7.00 p.m. at the Town Hall Council Chambers.

You can help by writing comments in support of licencing to Sharon Long, Planning & Building Services Division, via email at slong@thebluemountains.ca or by regular mail at 32 Mill Street, Box 310, Thornbury, Ontario, N0H 2P0. Comments received on or before April 9th, 2013 related to this matter will be included in the circulated Council Agenda package.

You can also help and show your support by simply coming to the meeting. Let’s fill the Chambers and show this Council that we care and we expect a favourable decision in moving forward with a STA Licencing By-law, sooner rather than later. The quality of our life and reasons for living here depend on this decision.

If you have any questions or require clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me at mpseguin@rogers.com.

**Michael P. Seguin,
President, Blue Mountain Ratepayers’ Association**

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ARTICLE 9 – TBM LIBRARY PROGRAMS

The Blue Mountains Library - Programs for April/May

Adult Programs:

Sheffield Park Black History and Cultural Museum - Carolynn and Sylvia Wilson-Curators

Tuesday April 16, 7 pm

Meet the Curators of the Museum, find out about the site, the progress being made and what is to come in the future.

Starting your Garden from Seed with Rebecca Baker, Master Gardener

Tuesday April 23, 7 pm

This is a hands-on workshop. There will be some started plants and seeds available for purchase.

Upcycling with Shannon Crippen

Tuesday May 7, 7 pm

Upcycling & repurposing involves giving waste materials & old or unwanted items more value, not less. Bring an item from home that you are not able to part with, but has been sitting unused. As a group, we will try to see it in a new light.

Arts Advisory Council Presents: Ecuador

Smaller than Newfoundland with more bio diversity than Europe and North America combined

Thursday May 9, 7 pm

Join Jill and Noel Bates as they share their travels through South America: from living at 9,000 feet in the first UNESCO World Heritage Site, Quito; to flying into the Amazon basin to live in at Kapawi, a native run eco-lodge; to driving down the spine of the Andes, south of Banos, through massive Cloud forests to the home of the Inca at Ingapirca, north of Cuenca.

Art Shows:

Showing Throughout April:

All Creation Sings

By Sheila Bannerman,

Kathie Wright, & Aggie Stretch

Meet the Artists Reception: Saturday April 13, 2:00-4:00 pm

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ARTICLE 10 – CRAIGLEITH COMMUNITY CENTRE



CRAIGLEITH COMMUNITY CENTRE 132 Lakeshore Road East, Craigleith Ontario

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- ✓ Designated as a heritage building
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- ✓ Wheelchair accessible
- ✓ Large outdoor play area

Ideal For: Business meetings, weddings, social events, anniversaries, social gatherings.

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ARTICLE 11 – NEWS AROUND TOWN

News Around Town

by Michael P. Seguin

Blue Mountain Resorts Plans Major Expansion on Orchard Property

Major changes are coming for the 2013/2014 ski season. The Blue Mountain Resorts are planning to invest \$10 million in the old orchard property, a 64 acre parcel located at the south end of the mountain, which will include 6 new ski trails and a state-of-the-art, high-speed, six person chairlift.

This investment will increase the Resort's skiable terrain to approximately 364 acres, increase the number of trails to 42 and bring the total number of chairlifts to 16. The expansion will also introduce a new 1.6 km trail that will be the longest beginner trail in Ontario.

This is not only a great investment in the ski industry but a great investment in the community in terms of economic development and tourism.

Source: *Simcoe.com February 16, 2013*

Housing Corporation being set up to solve affordable housing problem in TBM

In January, 2010, a new Housing Committee was established by a newly elected Council to bring back "Business Model/Plan" that would provide direction for attainable/affordable housing in TBM. In a deputation to Council on April 11, 2012, the

Housing Committee provided a business plan for a Town financed land lease proposal that would permit the construction of “20 attainable ownership housing units by 2020”. The Committee also requested permission to establish a Non-Profit Housing Corporation and asked for seed money (from taxation) in the amount of \$55,000 (\$25,000 in 2012 and \$10,000 in each of 2013, 2014 and 2015). The 2012 Budget approved \$175,000 over the same period – so there’s more to be had, if needed. The support to proceed with the Plan and the monies was moved by Councilor Gamble and seconded by Councilor McKean and approved without much debate by Council with Councilor Ardiel abstaining.

Interesting notes coming from the meeting – the Committee expressed no interest in being associated with the Grey County rental program; existing housing stock is not being considered; under foreclosure, the bank, as the first mortgagee, will assume the asset as a liability and the town will become a creditor under any type of default by the occupant/owner; the Housing Corporation will be wholly owned by the town and taxpayer monies will be on the hook for any risk/liabilities or legal matters that may arise; and that building lots are secretly being investigated by the Town staff in and around the community boundaries of Thornbury.

On March 4th, the Town held a Statutory Public Meeting to hear public comments about the creation of a Non-Profit Corporation and the Land Lease Business Plan. Other than Committee members, I think I was the only one that showed up. This was undoubtedly a done deal right from the beginning, way back in January, 2010. The final report was approved at the March 25th Council Meeting.

So what now? Will adding another level of bureaucracy result in providing affordable housing without impacting ratepayers? It appears that the Town wants to become a bank and play with the “big boys”. The Town auditors have told us that higher than normal service charges like tax rates, utility rates and user fees have benefitted this bank over the years with TBM having the best reserve balances in the region. This Council wants to maintain these increasing service charges to help grow the bureaucracy. But what I have told them repeatedly at Budget Meetings over the past 5 years, these charges are driving people away from TBM and are one of the real reasons for the decline in our permanent population base. In my opinion, allowing a Town bureaucracy to play banker in the housing market under a land lease plan will bring more risks than rewards to this Town.

For more information on the Land Lease Plan, I refer you to the Town website and March 4th meeting Presentation:

http://www.thebluemountains.ca/public_docs/events/Housing-Corp-FINAL.pdf

Source: April 11, 2012 Report BMHC.12.01 and Minutes and March 4th Presentation

TBM authorizes staff to tender for harbour dredging services immediately

At the February 11th Council meeting, a report was presented by Ryan Gibbons, Harbour Manager, requesting the “go-ahead” to tender for dredging services in the spring of 2013 in the Thornbury Harbour. Moved by Councilor Halos and seconded by

Councilor McKean, Council approved moving forward with the tender. Councilor Gamble opposed based on his concern with the debt implications.

cost of dredging in order to maintain the depths necessary for boating operations has been estimated to be in the range of \$200,000 to \$270,000. Given the short notice and the limited number of qualified dredgers, we expect this estimate to be at the upper limit or much higher. The Harbour Plan proposes that this cost be paid from debt or 10-year debentures, then repaid from annual user fee revenues. The Plan also states that “users may also have to make voluntary contributions towards dredging costs on a per-boat basis and that the yacht club be requested to pay an appropriate annual share of dredging costs”. Good luck with that – I sense a show down, with economic development and tourism being used to draw monies from the taxpayers.

Interestingly, the Plan states that a review should be considered to determine if it “would be cost-effective and practical to operate a collective dredging operation with other public or private Georgian Bay harbour’s that have dredging requirements”. I suspect that the need to “do it now” will rule out this more practical and appropriate solution that would reduce costs.

The tender process is scheduled to close March 13th, followed by a quick decision by Council.

Source: Report DOR.13.06 to Council February 11, 2013

Real Estate News Update

The first quarter statistics have not been published yet, but it appears that the Georgian Triangle real estate market has started on a positive note with the region seeing a slight growth in sales over the first two months in 2013. The Georgian Triangle Association of Realtors reports that sales increased from 231 units sold in 2012 to 240 units sold in 2013, reflecting a 3.9% over the first two months of the year. Not bad, but way too early to predict a boom and get those real estate optimists excited. The category experiencing the highest number of units sold continues to be in the less than \$199,999 price range, where affordability is still an issue. There were a greater number of higher end homes (greater than \$800,000) selling in 2013 compared to 2012, which inflated the average price of homes in the area to greater than \$362,000 compared to \$330,885 in 2012.

Interestingly, the Town of the Blue Mountains reported the greatest increase from 23 units sold in 2012 to 27 units sold in 2013, or a 17.4% increase. Collingwood had the most sales in 2013 with the number of units remaining at the same level as 2012. Except for Wasaga Beach, the remaining market areas saw declines in their sales.

The number of active listings has declined by 3.5% in 2013, while the number of expired listing went up by 6.5% in 2013. As Karen Poshtar states in her most recent real estate articles posted on her web site on March 7th, 2013, “active and expired listing are part of what makes our market in the Georgian Triangle a challenging one in any of the price categories”.

Source: www.CollingwoodHomes.ca (Karen Poshtar - Clairwood Real Estate).

News in The Blue Mountains:

- ❖ The Blue Mountain Village Foundation announced the appointment of Deb Keep to the position of Event Coordinator. Deb has been very active in fundraising events for many community organizations and will be a great addition to the Foundation that supports charitable organizations in the area of health, human resources, education, the arts, culture, the environment and recreation.
- ❖ The Courier Herald reported on March 1st (confirmed by MP Leitch's office) that the Blue Mountains will remain part of the Simcoe-Grey Federal riding – certainly a relief to many, including the Blue Mountain Resort, in promoting the growth of tourism in the region.
- ❖ Grey County reports that unforeseen assessment growth will allow them to reduce their tax rate from 0.74% to 0.64% in 2013. TBM is probably looking for ways to spend this savings. However, I wouldn't get too excited until after the appeal period. We all know that residential properties in the TBM are highly over assessed.
- ❖ Grey County Council passed a resolution (overwhelmingly 45-18) to ask the provincial government to place a moratorium on all industrial wind turbine development until full studies about adverse health effects on people living near them are completed. Wow, this must be serious when Grey County gets involved!
- ❖ Blue Mountains Chamber of Commerce handed out small business recognition awards on February 27th: Sustainable Innovation – **Scandinave Spa Blue Mountain**; Economic Impact – **Scenic Caves Nature Adventures**; Carol Kordts Customer Service Excellence – **Bruce Wine Bar**; Entrepreneur of the Year – **Grey Heron Natural Designs**; and Business of the Year Award – **The Dam Pub Gastropub**. Congratulations to all!!!!
- ❖ The Grey Sauble Conservation Authority Chair, Dick Hibma, recently reported to the Meaford Council that in 1995 they received \$3.5 million from the provincial government to operate and just over \$70,000 in 2012. Hibma warns that there are big changes coming to the Conservation Authorities, including the continuing reduction in funding and less investment in the environment, which will only increase the pressure on municipal partners and ultimately the property taxpayers. TBM watch out!

Quick News in the Town of Collingwood:

- ❖ It appears that Collingwood is back in the Casino game. On March 1, Council voted to explore the option of a 'integrated destination resort' that would potentially include a 400-suite hotel, restaurants, an entertainment venue, and a boutique casino. Big-time gambling industry expert, Steve Wolstenholme, was brought in to sell a \$200-million project that would employ about 850-to-1,000 people with the casino a 'catalyst' to bring people to the region. Council agreed not to proceed unless OLG pays the \$60,000 for a community referendum.
- ❖ The costs for Collingwood's new recreation facilities (pool and arena) are closing in on \$13 million mark. There are still questions about additional upgrades to Heritage Park in the \$3.0 million range and annual operating costs expected to be in the \$250,000 to \$350,000 range.

- ❖ An article in the Globe and Mail on March 11th introduced Garnet Pratt Siddall as President and Chief Executive Officer of Side Launch Brewing Co. Ltd. Ms. Sidall says the company plans to build “a craft brewery from scratch” along Mountain Road in Collingwood. Good luck Garnet – I can’t wait to hoist and launch this new beer.

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BMRA BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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BLUE MOUNTAIN RATEPAYERS' ASSOCIATION

"Protecting the Interests of the Community"

BMRA Membership Application – 2013

Please enclose a cheque for \$25, payable to **BMRA**, as your annual family membership fee. Mail the cheque, and this application form, to:

Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association

Box 198

Thornbury, ON NOH 2P0

www.bluemountainratepayers.ca

Last Name:

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In order to manage costs and protect the environment, newsletters and information updates will be sent to you via email. If you do not have access to email, copies of newsletters will be mailed.

In addition the email newsletter, I would also like to receive one in the mail

Can you recommend anyone that may wish to join?

Name, Address/Phone #

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