



# Online Newsletter

EARLY WINTER EDITION

DECEMBER, 2013

Editor: Michael P. Seguin

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 residents of The Blue Mountains. (Point to an Article in Contents and click.)

***The articles and/or comments printed in this issue represent the authors' opinions only and are not necessarily endorsed by the BLUE MOUNTAIN RATEPAYERS' ASSOCIATION (BMRA).***

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### Prelude to another Municipal Election in 2014

*By Michael P. Seguin*



Based on the number of Council, Committee and public meetings that I have attended over three terms, no seats at this Council should be considered safe. The “whole Town is talking” and many residents, both urban and rural, both part-time and full-time, are saying that they are not happy with the current attitude of this Council regarding their concerns and needs and the way the Town is spending their money.

The residents say that they are prepared to express their disappointment with incumbents at the polls in October, 2014. Residents are tired of being bullied and portrayed as NIMBY’s and their issues not being recognized or taken into consideration at public meetings. They expect solutions and demand best practices be followed in their municipality, just as their employer expects in their workplace. Residents also expect to be consulted more in advance of major issues, regardless of whether there’s a legal requirement to do so. They also want their concerns to be considered more in the decision making process, instead of being ignored or disregarded.

In my opinion, the “sleeping municipal giant” has been awakened and it won’t be satisfied till October, 2014.

Historically, municipal voter turn-out has been shamefully low, partly because of the (also shameful) high number of acclamations and false promises by many incumbents. We need to consider and encourage potential new candidates that will provide some choice and/or alternative. If you have any aspirations or desire to enact “change” in attitude and direction in the leadership of this community, please consider yourself as a candidate for the next election. The Board is planning to schedule an “all candidates” meeting in early October, 2014. This is in order to help our members decide the best candidates to lead us over the next 4 years (2015-2018).

It is important to mention that our membership base is stronger than ever, with approximately 280 family memberships representing close to 500 potential voters. In addition, we have now added 11 Condo memberships and 41 Board Directors who represent some 1,000 residential units in the Blue Mountain Resort area and also represent another 1,500 potential voters. Surely, based on 4,102 votes cast in the last election (38.81% of eligible voters), I think that we can help make a positive difference in our municipal affairs.

Starting with the municipal budget in January, 2014, our experienced Budget Review Committee will keep you apprised all the financial developments in the continuing saga of more taxes and charges resulting from more budget padding and discretionary spending in the new year and years to come.

If you have any topics or issues that you want our Board to consider in leading up to the municipal election, please do not hesitate to contact me through the website ([info@bluemountainratepayers.ca](mailto: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 – BREAKING DOWN THE BUDGET

### Breaking down the Budget

*By Michael P. Seguin*

The BMRA Budget Review Committee is anxiously awaiting the arrival of the Town's 2014 budget material so that they can start reviewing and commenting on the financial plan for the upcoming year. We are told that the budget provides the financial resources, your taxes, to implement programs and services delivered by the Town (also to maintain a large bureaucracy).

While most surrounding municipalities have started or have almost completed their budget reviews, our municipality is still in the preparation stage (being crafted behind closed doors). We are told that Council workshops won't be held until January 22, 2014 and the material won't be released until January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2014 or later.

The last we heard, back in June, 2013, Council instructed staff to prepare a base budget for 2014 at no more than 5.6% over the 2013 budgeted levy. However, I'm sure the tax levy will be different after we hear about continuing loss revenues and budget pressures like higher policing costs, higher salaries and wages, a substantial OMPF grant decrease (which our Town believes is an entitlement), higher insurance costs, etc. Of course, the municipal election in October, 2014 will certainly have an impact on the final 2014 levy and we will need to examine the 2015 and 2016 budgets for any hidden or delayed expenditures.

What will be most interesting is if members of Council are willing to debate the budget in public. Our Mayor prefers the 'no debate, no discussion and don't listen' budget. So I assume that members of Council will be told to ask the financial staff most of their questions via email and behind closed doors. We will certainly be monitoring the workshops to determine transparency, accountability and determining how, and if, members of council are representing us. Starting the process at the end of January, suggest a "hurry-up" budget.

Grey County has already passed their 2014 budget, which will include a 1.14% increase to the County portion of the property tax bill. This means that that the county tax levy will raise \$52 million from lower tier municipalities and the Blue Mountains will contribute approximate \$13 million or 25%.

The County is able to maintain a low increase in 2014 because of substantial uploading of services to the Province and new assessment growth (I wonder where?). This low increase is to assist lower tier municipalities like ours the ability to tax at a higher rate and then hide behind a low blended rate.

We will have more to say on the budget in our February newsletter and we hope to see some of our financial watch-dogs at the January 22, 2014 workshop.

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## ARTICLE 3 – TBM AND GREY COUNTY

### Why does TBM get such a low return on it's investment in Grey County?

*By the Budget Review Committee*

*(John Leckie, Terry Thompson, Ritchie Baird, Al Fraser, Janet Findlay, Michael Seguin)*

The Town of the Blue Mountains (TBM) sends \$13 million to the County each year, which represents approximately 25% of the County's annual operating Budget. For a Town that represents only 7% of Grey County's population, what are the TBM ratepayers getting in return for this huge contribution?

The Committee, on behalf of the BMRA, is proposing a Deputation in early 2014 that requests that the TBM undertake a review of existing Grey County services and address how TBM might obtain better value for these services in the future. The need for this review is highlighted by the growing importance of tourism in our County, which is placing heavy demands on our infrastructure. While the County update was an agenda item of the October 7<sup>th</sup> Council meeting and the issue was discussed; we do not feel it received the attention it deserved.

On October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013, several residents attended Council to hear Lance Thurston, CAO for Grey County, provide an update on activity/services throughout Grey County and more importantly, in the Town of the Blue Mountains. We were disappointed that the presentation was dominated by Deputy Mayor/Warden McKinlay and we heard little from Lance Thurston.

Therefore, the Committee decided it was necessary to request that another meeting be set up that would allow both the County CAO and TBM CAO provide a brief that would examine 'how we can get better value for County services'. The Public Meeting should allow questions from residents, either in writing or orally. These 2 CAOs have a lot of knowledge to share about our changing economic and demographic base and we need to hear their views.

For example let's examine in more detail several specific issues raised by TBM Councillors at the October 7<sup>th</sup> meeting:

Councillor Bob Gamble asked if 25% flows out of TBM to the County, why can't something closer to 25% flow back? Which begs the question: how much does in fact flow back?

Councillor Michael Martin wanted to hear some "options" with respect to TBM and the County. Councillor Martin noted there is an inequity between Grey County municipalities, and questioned if the County has investigated legislative requirements regarding the inequity argument, further noting this is not going away. He also stated that many Counties have special statutes and questioned if the County has undertaken research of these statutes. Duncan McKinlay noted that he will seek clarification on this matter for Councillor Martin; that response from Staff will be helpful.

Another option would be to send a representative to County who is less conflicted with a leadership title and wears TWO MAJOR HATS, such as Mayor or Deputy Mayor; in other words simply send a Councillor, chosen by Council for 4 years only, who would act more like a steward of OUR money.

Could there be a bigger role for senior's housing in TBM? Councillor Gail Ardiel touched on this with her question about the role of the Georgian Village Campus in The Town of Penetanguishene?

Councillor John McKean questioned why in TBM is there just 10Kms of roads to receive upgrades.

Given a new 6 month trial transit project in the TBM, Lance Thurston hinted that there may be funding opportunities available to the County regarding regional transportation? Has the County explored other transit funding opportunities with regard to gas tax monies and the Sustainable Path program? It is critical that we make every effort to make this pilot transit project succeed.

The Committee is hoping that TBM Council will provide a forum for the TBM ratepayers to glean more information with a goal of achieving more value for our tax dollars. Moreover, we need a forum to finally give TBM Councillors a greater opportunity to debate. There are clearly some healthy differences of opinion amongst themselves on how we should proceed within these changing economic and demographic circumstances.

No doubt, the County funding allocation/model needs to be a 2014 election issue. The BMRA will endeavor to clearly identify candidates for our Council who see the money going to the County as being ratepayer money versus candidates who see it as an opportunity fund for unelected County politicians.

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## ARTICLE 4 – MEMBERSHIP

### Time to renew your BMRA Membership for 2014

*By Kim Posen*

I'd like to start by welcoming two new members to the BMRA Board of Directors—Blanka Guyatt and Kim Willis. They bring a fresh perspective to the Board, and their input is greatly appreciated.

Later in this newsletter, you will find an article on *Public Participation*, and how crucial it is to ensuring a responsive and accountable government. Your membership dollars are an essential part of the process, allowing us to publish newsletters, maintain the BMRA website, and host meetings including our annual AGM, among other things.

If you have already renewed, we thank you for your continued support. If you haven't renewed, there is a Membership Application Form on the last page of this newsletter. You may also follow this [LINK](#) to reach the Membership page on the BMRA website, with forms and the online Membership form.

**If you have any questions, please call our new information line**

**[705-607-1440](tel:705-607-1440)**

**or visit [www.bluemountainratepayers.ca](http://www.bluemountainratepayers.ca)**

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## ARTICLE 4 – TRANSIT LINK

### A new transit link from Collingwood to the Blue Mountains!

*By Michael P. Seguin*

On November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the new Collingwood-Blue Mountain bus transit link was launched from The Grand Georgian at the Blue Mountain Resort. The service is being presented for a 6 month trial period (from November, 2013 to May, 2014, 7 days a week from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. and from 3 p.m. until 7 p.m.) and is a collaborative effort and working partnership between the Towns of Collingwood and The Blue Mountains and the Blue Mountain Resort (public and private sector partners).

The new transit link is seen as an economic benefit to both municipalities and will also provide a regional connectivity to the Town of Wasaga Beach. The Blue Mountain Resort is the largest employer in the region. An effective and affordable transit link makes the Resort more accessible for service people, who work there but require smaller and more affordable accommodation outside TBM. It also helps people with disabilities, who could never work or visit the Resort unless they found affordable and accessible means of transportation. This new transit link (which will also include stops in Craighleith) is also expected to provide tourists an opportunity to shop and attend special events in both locations, without worrying about parking and making other arrangements. Finally, if we consider ourselves as environmentalists, then a successful public transit system will certainly play a role in reducing the dependence on, and use, of cars, which will help improve the air quality, decrease greenhouse gas emissions and conserve energy.

Is the new transit link a good thing – the simple answer is YES. Is it sustainable? I hope so.

The six month trial period is expected to cost \$82,200, which is to be offset by a \$40,000 contribution from the Resort, \$18,000 each from the Towns of Collingwood and Blue Mountains and a very conservative but responsible ridership income of \$9,000 (based on single fares at \$2.00 and monthly pass at \$40.00). In my opinion, this is a very small investment that comes with many potential benefits.



Looking into the future, we know that transit services are seldom, if ever, profitable. However, the service can still be successful if the economic benefits outweigh reasonable costs. Based on conservative budgetary income projections, including \$90,000 of provincial gas tax money, from 2015-2018, it appears that TBM's contribution to the continuing transit service would be between \$25,000 and \$35,000 per annum plus a possible capital layout for the purchase of a new bus in 2015. The provincial gas tax money is only available for municipal transit service if TBM commits to financial support.

It appears that further cost reductions could be achieved by attracting new private partnerships (which hasn't been factored in), by increasing ridership income (which has been based on conservative estimates) and by soliciting funding from the Town of Wasaga Beach and the Counties of Simcoe and Grey (all of which have not been factored in). The BMRA believes that Grey County must provide more benefits for TBM's \$13 million tax contribution to them - this is now a great opportunity for Grey County to step up to the table and provide a significant economic contribution to TBM.

Is the new transit link sustainable? – I think so.

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## ARTICLE 5 – WIND TURBINES

### Wind Turbines, Our Town, and the Green Energy Act

*Anyone interested in buying a house next to or in close proximity to a 66 foot high (including height of blade) wind turbine? The neighbours of Craigeith Woods (just west of Osler Bluff Road) are asking why our Provincial Liberal Government would permit, let alone provide incentive for, such an installation in a residential neighbourhood, and without municipal approval and public consultation. In my opinion, it is obvious that the self-serving Liberal Agenda and it's Green Energy Act take precedent over the concerns of residents and their communities. I haven't even touched on the impact these supposed "renewable energy projects" will have on future hydro costs and our ability to afford a home in the TBM - ouch!!!! Our*

resident expert on energy matters and a member of the BMRA, Ron Hartlen, provides a brief article on the wind turbine fiasco.

**By Ron Hartlen, PEng (Retired), Clarksburg**

The tentacles of Ontario's insidious and destructive Green Energy Act have recently reached into the Town of Blue Mountains. The scenario below surfaced at Council, as reported in a local Newspaper.

A homeowner intended to erect a small "home-scale" wind turbine. The location is on a residential cul de sac wherein the homes are relatively closely spaced. Neighbours, concerned about the visual blight, potential noise, and probable impact on property values, took these concerns to the Town Staff and to Council. *The Town's hands, of both Staff and Council, are completely tied by Ontario's Green Energy Act.*

The electrical-output rating of the turbine, as originally proposed, featured a generator of a size such that at least a building permit would be required. This was modified to employ the same tower and wind-turbine rotor, but with a smaller generator. In the new lower-rated configuration, there are no requirements to be met, *and the homeowner can do whatever he wants to; the Green Energy Act sets all the rules, and a municipality has no say or control whatsoever.*

*Everyone should be made aware of this, and we should all forcefully do, write and say whatever might help apply pressure for change; the next turbine might be right next door to your home!*

On the broader Provincial scale, large industrial-scale wind power "farms" are negatively affecting the lives and health of rural Ontarians. Many huge new projects have been approved very recently, long after a new Premier took the reins. Nothing has changed. Government Departments, supposedly there to protect our Health and our Environment, consistently and aggressively come down on the side of enabling the approval of projects.

All of this is being done in spite of the irrefutable fact that Wind Power has contributed essentially nothing to reducing Ontario's coal burning. We currently burn very little coal, and all coal-fired

plants are about to be permanently shut down anyway. *Building more Wind Power will actually lead to increased CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by, in effect, replacing CO<sub>2</sub>-free Hydro and Nuclear with natural gas.* In spite of this, Ontario's Wind Power capacity is about to triple, with several hundred new and larger Turbines set to appear in rural Southwestern Ontario.



Many Ontarians have been led to believe that Wind Power has provided and will provide benefits to our Air Quality and our Environment. *This is simply not true. It's all cost: dollar costs, environmental costs and societal costs.* Wake up everybody!!

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## ARTICLE 6 – STA LICENCING

### Good News – STA Licencing Bylaw Passed

*Michael Seguin, On behalf of the BMRA Board and members of BMRA-STA Committee*

The Short Term Accommodation (STA) Licensing By-law was passed unanimously by Council on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013. A “phased in” implementation date is scheduled to commence on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014. This by-law does not apply to ALL rental properties. It only applies to properties being rented to tourists as temporary accommodations for periods less than 30 days. We expect to hear more from Town staff in early 2014 in the form of communication as to exactly how this will all work – roles and responsibilities, requirements, details of the application process, and effective date, etc.

The BMRA is very pleased and relieved to have reached the next milestone in this long, arduous process. We now have an extensively studied, well written STA licensing by-law that reflects ‘best practices’ and incorporates input from STA stakeholders, professionals, and residents alike. Hopefully, people on all sides of this issue can take pride in what has been accomplished here. Through a collaborative effort and the hard work of many people, a resolution to a very contentious community problem is now in hand.

In our opinion and from a resident’s perspective, the most positive components in the by-law are as follows:

- a) Responsibility and accountability for managing STAs remains entirely with the owner/operators;
- b) Overcrowding and public safety concerns have been addressed with certainty as per fire regulations;
- c) Clear expectations have been established for the operation of STAs re: property maintenance, renter code of conduct, parking, garbage, local contact person, etc. Consumer safety should improve the ‘tourist’ experience.
- d) A straight forward ‘demerit point’ system should make it easier to sanction non-compliant operators; and
- e) Once implemented, licensing should lead to a more peaceful co-existence of ‘grandfathered’ units located in low-density residential neighbourhoods.

These improvements will be good for our community, good for the travelling public and ultimately, good for the Tourist Accommodation Industry in the Blue Mountains and the greater Georgian Bay Region.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Mayor Ellen Anderson and Members of Council for showing leadership and the conviction necessary to pass this by-law. We’d also like to thank David Finbow, Director, Planning & Building Services and his staff for all of their dedication and hard work over the years in moving the process forward, especially through the difficult OMB and Court challenges as well as the final drafting of the bylaw. Please know that together, our efforts will make a positive difference in our community and in the lives of the residents and visitors. For that, we are very thankful!

A heart-felt “thank you” also goes out to the many residents who participated in this process. We know that the complexity of politics and public participation can be intimidating. Some residents are active participants while others work quietly in the background, allowing community leaders to speak on their behalf. The fact is - we had wide spread community support on this issue. We couldn’t have brought this problem to such a positive resolution without your help. Public participation **can** and **does** make a difference - your contribution to ensuring the sustainability of our community is invaluable.

“Many people are good at talking about what they are doing, but in fact do little. Others do a lot but don’t talk about it; they are the ones who make a community live.”

*Jean Vanier, Community and Growth*

We will keep you posted in future newsletters as the process continues.

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## ARTICLE 7 – LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



### Always on the look-out – Road Watch

The neighborhood watch program has been successful in the Jozo Weider area over the past summer with only one or two incidents and no real damage to property. The watch area is an established residential neighborhood between The Blue Mountain Inn and The Resort Village, an extremely heavily travelled roadway and sidewalk due mainly to the success of both The Village and the many accommodations in close proximity to the Village.

The posted speed along Jozo Weider Blvd. is 50km/hr, mostly adhered to by the many large transport trucks that deliver to the restaurants and other businesses in the area but disregarded by smaller vehicles that treat this straight piece of road as their own personal speedway.

Fulltime residents suggest the limit should be reduced to 40km/hr, or the same as around the South Lodge on Gord Canning Drive. That area is highly travelled in the ski season only, whereas Jozo Weider Blvd. attracts crowds of pedestrians and constant heavy road traffic throughout the year. The excessive speeds, which residents experience constantly in this built-up area, remain unchecked and dangerous. There are OPP patrols driving thru daily, but a black & white parked regularly would prove more of a deterrent.

*Denis Fennessy,  
Zone Coordinator,  
Craighleith Neighbourhood Watch*

### Where do our taxes go?

Of every dollar we pay in taxes in the Town of The Blue Mountains 40% go to the County 22% to Education and 38% to Town. From these figures we can see that 62% of TBM revenue is leaving us and going to the County or Province. The Town is left with only 38 %.

Since 49% of the Town budget goes to Salaries and 15% to policing little is left to cover all the other Town costs. Is there any wonder our roads and sidewalks are in poor shape.

In contrast Meaford with almost double our population pay 26% to County 20% Education 8% Police and 46% Town. From this comparison we can see that TBM with nearly half the population of Meaford pays 14% more to County. It should also be pointed out that because we are considered a tourist community with a population on any given winter week-end of 70,000 our policing cost at 15% is 7% higher than Meaford.

There is no shortage of tax revenue in the TBM. The problem is we have a leakage of about half our revenue and this is becoming unsustainable as the economic engine of the tourist industry ramps up.

Councils of the future will have to find a way to spend more wisely and to get better value from the County and the Province in order to give taxpayers fair value for their tax dollars.

At least that's the way I see it.

*Paul Mitchell, Thornbury, ON*

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## ARTICLE 8 – PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

### **Public Participation can make a positive difference in our community**

*By Michael P. Seguin*

The Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association (BMRA) is a not-for profit volunteer group committed to the Town of the Blue Mountains succeeding as a residential, agricultural and four seasons recreational community. However, our commitment does not come without challenges that can threaten the quality and safety of our neighbourhoods, and the community at large.

The BMRA is not an activist group. We like to consider ourselves an advocate group, one that provides a stronger voice for residents who have legitimate concerns but don't understand the complexities of politics, find public participation intimidating and generally feel that they have no chance in making positive changes to viewed 'threats to their community' - they feel like they will be ignored and treated as NIMBYs.

The concept of NIMBYism may be a 'headache' to the decision-making process but we find, more and more, that it's a 'heartache' to the many people who are threatened and are standing up for themselves. The BMRA can offer to assist these residents by investigating potential threats, bringing awareness to their status, exploring the methods necessary, if possible, to bring about positive change, but most importantly, by providing a forum for the residents to be heard through organized committees and 'Public Participation'.

The Short Term Accommodation (STA) issue is well-documented over the past 6-7 years. What started out as a local nuisance issue or the odd 'party house' near the base of Resort Village, turned into a proliferation of income generating STA 'party palaces' in low density residential areas. The Town, the OMB and the Division Court have all determined that STAs, if left uncontrolled, would create more serious compatibility issues in residential areas and could be a serious threat to the health and safety of the residents and the travelling public. Fearing that these threats could expand into other neighbourhoods throughout the Town and understanding the impacts on our OPP and Fire services and costs, public participation grew wider and stronger for a STA Licensing By-law and Program. Many residents dedicated lots of time, persevered and eventually made a difference in the Town moving forward with Licensing. In a related article, we thank all those that participated.

The proposed Telfer 'Adult Lifestyle Village' consisting of 86-units on land leases and located at the south east corner of Napier Street and Victoria Street in the village of Thornbury, is another example of public participation making a difference. The original development concept was modified at least 3 times as a result of a group of almost 100 residents collectively meeting regularly and voicing their concerns/constructive suggestions on densities, designs and planning compatibility issues. Many believe that the positive changes, resulting from their strong voice over a two year period, would have just been ignored by this Council. The BMRA strongly supported the groups' views and assisted in bringing awareness to the rest of the community regarding the greater planning issues in this Town.

Lastly way back in August, 2010 (before the last election), the whole Town of Thornbury was talking about Thornbury Gate, a proposed 169 unit senior assisted living housing project in two large apartment buildings (a 3 storey and a 5 storey building behind the Thornbury Health Centre). The entire community rose to the occasion and participated in sending out flyers, brochures, designing a website for information and speaking out at a Public Meeting. Once again the BMRA supported the residents of this community and brought awareness to the rest of the community. Now 3 years later, the applicant has now revised

their development proposal to permit a more acceptable 45 townhouse units with a maximum height of 3 storeys. Would anyone disagree that strong public participation made a positive difference?

These are just three examples how public participation can and has made a positive difference in our community - imagine how many wrongs would be perpetrated on our community because no one asked questions, no one took action, and no one cared.

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## ARTICLE 9 – TELFER UPDATE

### **Second OMB hearing required to finalize Telfer project details**

*By Brian Nelson, Napier-Victoria Residents Group*

An Ontario Municipal Board Hearing was held on Thursday, November 21, 2013, at the Blue Mountains Town Hall to resolve outstanding issues relating to the Telfer Homes development at the southeast corner of Napier and Victoria Streets in Thornbury.

The outstanding issues included minor adjustments to the Site Plan, and some unresolved wording in the Site Plan Agreement concerning funding for a future public road along the south boundary of the site. The Town and the developer reached agreement on these issues, and an order from the OMB approving the Zoning By-Law Amendment and Site Plan Agreement for the project is expected shortly.

This was the second OMB Hearing on the Telfer project. At the first Hearing on January 29, 2013, the OMB allowed an appeal by Telfer against Council's decision to not approve the development. The Board also approved a concept plan for 86 low-rise single, semi and townhouse units, and instructed the Town and the developer to finalize the Zoning By-Law Amendment and Site Plan Agreement.

The bottom line for residents is that the Telfer project is very close to final approval, and the Site Plan remains essentially the same as the concept approved in January: One housing unit along Victoria Street has been removed to accommodate an expanded storm water pond, reducing the total units to 85.

The Telfer project remains controversial. The attempt to integrate a large, single-purpose "adult lifestyle" development into a small, established village like Thornbury is unprecedented, and many questions about the proposed land-lease tenure remain unanswered. However, constant pressure from residents has made a big difference to the plan, basically transforming it from a crowded and ugly "barracks" to something more compatible with the adjacent neighbourhood, including single and semi-detached homes facing neighbouring streets around the perimeter of the site.

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## ARTICLE 10 – NEWS AROUND TOWN

*By Michael P. Seguin*

### **Council continues its "investigator services agreement" for another two years**

At its November 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting, Council decided to continue to pay \$330 per annum ( for two years) to retain Local Authority Services (LAS), a Branch of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, to be the Town's 'closed meeting' investigators. The other option was to defer to the Ombudsman Office of Ontario

which investigates closed meeting complaints, for free, when a municipality has not appointed a closed meeting investigator. I guess the thinking is that paying for a private service would make it more difficult for the public, discourage more complaints and result in fewer risks.

This Council continues to have numerous 'closed meetings' and provide limited information on the reasons for these meetings. They are all sworn to secrecy and are not allowed to discuss matters and "secrets" discuss behind closed doors - so much for openness and transparency.

For more information on closed meetings, I refer you to my article "Closed municipal meetings – are they really necessary?" in the April, 2012 edition of the BMRA newsletter "the View from Blue."

**Source: Town Report A.13.10 dated November 13, 2013**

## **TBM approves new charges on serviced and unconnected vacant lots**

On November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013, Council decided, unanimously, to ignore public opinion expressed at a Public Meeting held on October 28<sup>th</sup> (26 emails/letters and oral presentations) and pressed staff to move ahead with charging "Infrastructure Replacement Fees" on owners of unconnected vacant lots fronting municipal water and wastewater services. For developers, these fees will apply to lots in undeveloped subdivisions, that have either been assumed or 3 years after providing the basic services.

The By-law for imposing water charges and sewer charges was approved (moved by McKean and seconded by Gamble) without any debate and the fee for four months in 2013 (pre-approved in the 2013 budget) was set at \$15.00 per month for water and \$13.25 per month for wastewater. We were assured that the money, collected via these charges, would be held in two new Asset Replacement Reserve Funds, collect interest and be reported to the Public on an annual basis - I guess we shall see.

Two important changes were made to the Town's Corporate Policies and Procedures regarding these charges: 1) vacant lots must be deemed to have "development potential" i.e. zoned to permit the construction of a building or structure greater than 50 m<sup>2</sup> (changed from the ability to receive a building permit); and 2) if there is a dispute regarding the criteria of the lot's development potential, then the owner has the right to appeal the charge(s).

As one 77 year old owner of a vacant lot wrote in "It pains me that governments of most levels are always looking for new income sources and will not make the tough decisions to reduce expenses and expenditures and lower costs to overburdened taxpayers.....My confidence in government to hold down expenditures and live within the means of the taxpayer's ability to pay is practically zero".

**Source: Report FIT.13.57 dated November 13, 2013 and By-law 2013-6 approved as Item H.3 on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

## **Further changes to development agreements in TBM**

A working committee comprised of Councilors Gamble and Martin and Deputy Mayor McKinlay convinced Councilors Halos and Ardiel to move forward with changes in 2014 to the length of time it takes for the town to assume control and ownership of roads in new developments. Councilor McKean was the lone dissenter.

Currently the Town takes over a road in a subdivision only after 75% of the proposed homes are built. However, this could take years, even decades (as you probably have noticed), but the developer is responsible for the road until the 75% benchmark is reached. The reason given by the Town is to make the developer, and not the taxpayer, responsible for maintenance and repair of the new works because the infrastructure, particularly roads, curbs and sidewalks, are susceptible to damage during house construction activities to the point where significant replacement work is needed.

A motion was approved by Council that will implement a change from a 75% assumption to a 3-year assumption criteria based on three conditions 1) implementation of a lot frontage deposit which will be collected when a lot owner applies for a building permit and cover the costs of damages done to the road or curbs in front of the lot due to home construction; 2) requirement of a refundable security deposit of 6.5% of the total capital cost to install the roads from the developer to guarantee the roads for 5 years

after assumption; and 3) requirement of a one-time non-refundable payment for maintenance of the storm water management system.

Councilor McKean argues that the current criteria works fine and that the proposed change will set us back 9 years when there were occurring damages to new roads and costing the taxpayer money. We certainly would like to hear from the development side – is this change seen as being more acceptable and less burdensome? Will the proposed conditions protect the taxpayers?

**Source: Council motion and discussion on November 25<sup>th</sup> and Courier-Herald article of December 5, 2013.**

## **For your pleasure and education**

The Watershed Trust Foundation (BMWTF) and Elelphant Thoughts are continuing to offer the “Be the Change” documentary film series at the Gayety Theatre in Collingwood. These educational films are about environmentally-focused challenges facing our world today. Make sure you plan to attend all or at least one of the remaining films:

January 15, 2014 – **Occupy Love** - explores how the collapse of the old greed paradigm of concentrated wealth causing economic and ecological collapse has become a catalyst for a profound global awaking.

February 189, 2014 – **Watermark** - a film by Edward Burtynsky that explores the relationship between water and humans - a must see!!!!

March 9, 2014 – **Stand!** - A standup paddleboard (SUP) expedition through the mystical Pacific Coast archipelago of Haida, Gwaii that could be jeopardized. See what could happen.

April 16, 2014 - **Fat Sick and nearly Dead** - an inspiring film about the director’s personal mission to regain his health.

Tickets can be purchased at the door for only \$8.00 (starting at 6.30 p.m.) For more information on the film series, please visit: [www.bethechangefilmseries.com](http://www.bethechangefilmseries.com)

## **Real Estate News Update**

Before providing you with up-to-date statistics, we must advise everyone that the Georgian Triangle Association of Realtors (GTAR) has merged with the Southern Georgian Bay Real Estate Association (SGBREA), involving various municipalities to the north east (i.e. Midland, Penetanguishene, etc.) to become the Southern Georgian Bay Association of Realtors (SGBAR). For reporting consistency, the Georgian Triangle will be called the SGBAR Western District. Hopefully, you are not confused.

Despite cooling temperatures, the SGBAR Western District market (or the former Georgian Triangle as we knew it) has not cooled and continues to experience a moderate upward swing in sales activity and the average residential sale price, with no signs of a downward slide. There were 220 sales recorded in the month of October bringing the 2013 year-to-date total to 1,863 or 7% greater than the 1,734 recorded in 2012. The \$350,000 to \$499,900 price category continues to be the biggest seller with an 18.1% increase over the same period last year. The next highest category was the up to \$199,999 which saw an 11.4% increase over last year – a sure sign that buyers are pursuing affordable homes. Sales in all other categories, including the \$1.0 million dollar homes, were up slightly from last year.

It is important to note, that the number of listings over the year have continued to drop making it a tighter market and more a seller’s market.

Breaking down the sales over the year (up to October, 2013), Collingwood was down by 1.7% (293 sales), The Blue Mountains was up by 2.1% (149 sales), Meaford was up by 21.6% (107 units) and Wasaga Beach was up by 3.7% (392 sales).

The average residential price over a 10-month period ending October 2013 was \$332,650 compared to \$319,738 over the same period in 2012 – a 4.0% increase. Most of the increase came at the beginning of the year as the average sale price in October, 2013 actually dropped to \$326,816.

While investment in our real estate market continues to be an attractive option to many visitors, affordability continues to play a significant factor in the SGBAR Western District urban markets. Our sources tell us that November is expected to see only moderate increases in sales, sale prices and listings.

**Source: [www.thechestnutparkblog.com](http://www.thechestnutparkblog.com) (provided by B. Thomson) and Karen Poshtar (Clairwood Real Estate).**

## **Quick Announcements:**

- Contrary to popular belief and wishes, Sobeys is not building a Sobeys Club Store in the west end of Thornbury; the plans are to build a 30,410 sq. ft. supermarket for a new 'Foodlands', together with a 8,021 sq. ft. retail building for a new 'LCBO'; site preparations commenced about a month ago (end of November, 2013), with the expectation that the 'Foodlands' building will be constructed and opened sometime in the late summer of 2014; there are plans for two additional buildings and when built out, the property will be known as 'Thornbury Square'.
- Blue Mountain Resort (BMR) officially opened some ski runs on Saturday November 30<sup>th</sup> – the earliest opening day since 2004; BMR is now looking forward to more snow and more cold weather as well as opening its new 'Runs in the Orchard' later this month (hopefully before Christmas); go to [www.bluemountain.ca](http://www.bluemountain.ca) for snow and ski conditions.
- TBM Council held a workshop on November 13<sup>th</sup> to discuss moving forward with new Development Charges By-laws. It was decided that new background studies are required to re-assess the growth related service needs over a 10 year capital program. It appears that the Town's expectation of growth in 2010 (210 units per annum compared to an average of only 60 units over the past three years) was way out of line with reality and their capital program wants. The services of Hemson Consulting Limited will be required to bring these charges more in line with reality by June, 2014. Stay tuned!

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# BLUE MOUNTAIN RATEPAYERS' ASSOCIATION

*"Protecting the Interests of the Community"*

## BMRA Membership Application – 2014

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

Last Name:

---

First Name(s):

---

TBM Address:

---

City

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