



# THE VIEW FROM BLUE

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BOX 198, THORNBURY, ON N0H 2P0

## SUMMER 2015

### BMRA Goals and Accomplishments

Your Ratepayers' Association has had a very busy...and we hope you agree, successful year. Since saying goodbye to your Past President Michael Seguin at last year's Annual General Meeting, we have welcomed him as an elected Councillor. That is success.

We now have more influence on Town Council and rely on Michael, as well as some other Councillors, to keep our new Mayor's feet to the fire on campaign messages .... messages that promised change.

Last summer, when we interviewed the candidates, we grilled them on our Focus Five topics. We looked to the candidates to suggest permanent fixes to our challenges and take a long run approach with solutions. The new Mayor, John McKean, was very deliberate in his campaign to make one of those 5 points a cornerstone of his election; that of trying to get a better deal with Grey County. Some have called the election of John McKean an election upset, directly linked to this call for change. Where this will eventually go is very difficult to predict. We aren't calling for equality. We are calling for More fairness.

#### Short Term Accommodation

Another issue is the Short Term Accommodation issue. Impacted residents sometimes felt they were living in a third world style combat zone (slightly exaggerated but not much). The de facto Committee chair, who carried the spear for years, is now- Councillor Michael Seguin. We mustn't lose this opportunity to have

an advocate for concerned residents with a seat on Council. A lot of progress has been made but more work needs to be done.

#### Grey County

We see the Town of The Blue Mountains as the "cash cow" for a broken funding model of rural Ontario which is emptying out. The demographics are changing as more youth are moving to the cities where the knowledge-based economy is growing. Nevertheless, TBM can uniquely thrive because of the gift of our geography which drives our "destination" economy. But we can't be sustainable and also shoulder imploding rural areas around us. Hence the BMRA support for needed change and the surprise election of our candidate for Mayor who understands this challenge. To paraphrase Edmund Burke: The only thing necessary for the triumph of bad government is for good men and women to do nothing.

#### Water and Waste Water Fees

A lot of BMRA effort that has gone into keeping staff and Council's feet to the fire and more effort is underway to expose the Town's tendency to move reserves around. As an example, current Wastewater users pay monthly

fees to operate, maintain and replace the Town's Wastewater systems and are told that there is a large infrastructure deficit gap in the Asset Replacement Fund for wastewater assets. Yet staff recommended that \$87K in reserve funds be taken to subsidize a proposed sewer conversion project. One could argue that if such funds are used to subsidize new systems being brought on-stream, the infrastructure deficit will not be easily eliminated without increasing user fees further, which are already deemed by many to be too high.

It is also a highly discriminatory practice against current Wastewater users who are already paying their fair share of Wastewater operations.

The BMRA Budget Review Committee is considering making a request to Town Council to pass a By-Law that would prohibit the use of Water/Wastewater Asset Reserve Funds for unrelated Town expenditures (to be defined). Staff will always maintain that Council, by majority vote, has the right to take funds from any reserve fund established on the Town's books. However, the BMRA view is that Water/Wastewater reserves should

### BMRA Board of Directors

- Peter Bordignon pbordignon@outlook.com
- Denis Fennssey djf@rogers.com
- Janet Findlay jfindlay@rogers.com
- Blanka Guyatt blankaguyatt777@gmail.com
- John Leckie john.leckie@rogers.com
- Jane Moysey jane@janemoysey.com
- Peter Sharpe pesharpe@rogers.com
- Catherine Sholtz-Seguín csholtz.50@hotmail.com
- Terry Thompson terencethompson@rogers.com
- Laurie Thorne lauriethorne@rogers.com

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be protected the same way that the Municipal Act protects ratepayers from funding Water/Wastewater systems from property taxes.

For the past several years we have pressed the Town to modify its ridiculous standby water contract with Collingwood. *TBM finally listened; they changed that deal and it now saves us \$250,000 a year. It saves taxpayers a lot of water fees and it alone justifies the \$25 per annum membership fee for BMRA!*

### Planning and Development

Over the past years much work went into the preparation of Design Guidelines for our municipality. The BMRA approached the new Town Planner, Michael Benner, with a request to have the Guidelines included in the new Official Plan. What we are seeking are clear design standards so that all participants in the development process understand and respect the community's rules and expectations regarding design.

There is a widespread and well-documented need to ensure that developments are designed in a way that protects and enhances the character of our Town.

Recently a delegation addressed Council on the issue of the proposed Windfall development. The delegation stated: "The height and visual impact are out of synch with the surrounding area. Any development permitted should be designed and located in such a manner as to preserve the natural, visual and cultural characteristics of the area. This proposal does none of that."

This Windfall development is one that binds us together and causes us to recall what Councillor Michael Martin has succinctly articulated: "Do the residents recognize themselves in the Official Plan?" We need to be "Open For Business" but we need to make it more clear to investors what we are all

about. As Michael Benner said in our last Newsletter: "We can't be expected to do to things on a scale of the GTA (or Golden Horseshoe)... and it is vitally important to have a small town look and feel".

In the end what is required is prioritization of the issues and then some leadership from our Mayor and Council on those issues. If we get that, then the BMRA can actually work with the Town to help move us toward desired goals instead of just being on the attack.

There is virtually no media coverage on fiscal issues at any government level ... the media just covers scandals of the \$90,000 variety, a National Enquirer mentality level.

We see our job at the BMRA as one of informing voters on the issues and of advocating for change in areas of interest to ratepayers. And in a diverse populace, there will be lots of opinions. The BMRA tries to represent a diversity of thought going in our newsletters. Please get in touch and let us know your thoughts.

## Recorded Voting Process at Grey County

The weighted voting process is based on the County of Grey Act 1993 which stipulates that during recorded votes at County Council, a weighted voted system is in place. The number of votes per municipality is based on its number of electors, one vote per thousand electors, or part thereof.

### Votes at the County:

Chatsworth with 6182 Eligible Voters - 7 Votes  
 Georgian Bluffs with 9865 Eligible Voters - 10 Votes  
 Grey Highlands with 9974 Eligible Voters - 10 Votes  
 Hanover with 5474 Eligible Voters - 6 Votes  
 Meaford with 9952 Eligible Voters - 10 Votes  
 Owen Sound with 16902 Eligible Voters - 17 Votes  
 Southgate with 6193 Eligible Voters - 7 Votes  
 Blue Mountains with 10794 Eligible Voters - 11 Votes  
 West Grey with 11406 Eligible Voters - 12 Votes

## Michael Seguin's Tribute To Don Braden

As Past President of the Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association (BMRA), I wish to express, on behalf of all the members of the Association, our deepest sympathy to Don's family and best wishes to the many people that worked and shared closely in his accomplishments over the past 11 years at BLUE.

Don was a member of the BMRA before I came on to the scene back in 2005. So you can see that he started thinking about a link to the community as soon as he was appointed President of the Blue Mountain Village Association (BMVA) in December, 2004.

When I met Don back in early 2007, I was still relatively new to the BMRA Board but I was actively campaigning to communicate the BMRA Brand town-wide and the need to get more of our members involved in local and everyday issues. I took over the newsletter and started developing an effective website. Don, being the visionary that he was, recognized our movement and Town-wide reach. He also acknowledged that the time was 'ripe' for the BMVA condo stakeholders to develop a positive relationship with the ratepayers, as he worked towards enhancing the brand and the goals of the BMVA and the Blue Mountain Resort (BMR).

Then one day, Don along with Gord Canning, called me and invited a few of the BMRA Board Directors to have a meeting to discuss and further pursue this relationship between the BMRA and the BMVA condo stakeholders. Don suggested and convinced us that unit owners within a condominium complex share many of the same Town-wide issues as freehold owners, and that a larger voice would carry greater weight in expressing everyone's concern. Needless to say, I was easily convinced and quickly started drafting By-law Amendments that would incorporate a new Condo Membership.

So in June, 2009, and thanks to Don's

efforts, the BMRA members welcomed and approved the new Condo Membership and the Association became a stronger voice in the community, with the addition of 12 new Condo Corporations accounting for some 1,000 residential units in the Blue Mountain Resort area.

Before his untimely death, Don was continuing his community work as Chair of the Blue Mountain Village Foundation, which provided financial support to local Georgian Bay charitable organizations in need of necessary funding, while still continuing to promote the "greater Blue Mountain experience to the benefit of Village stakeholders".

On a personal note, Don was a business confidant who would always lend a friendly ear to my community concerns, both as President of the Association and now as a Councilor at The Blue Mountains, and would give me some direction in pursuing the answers. I could always lean on him and I will certainly miss him.

## Organics Collection

The Town of The Blue Mountains is pleased to announce the introduction of organics collection in the Town, starting in Fall 2015. This new program will include weekly curbside and multi-unit (condominium) collection of kitchen organics from green bins which will be supplied to each home. Bagged leaves and plant matter (yard waste) will also be collected seasonally starting this Fall from curbside. There will also be a special collection of used or old single use household batteries in November.

The Town has been studying the issue of organics diversion and consulting with the public and other stakeholders on its implementation for a number of years – including conducting an organics collection pilot in 2009. With these new programs it is anticipated that by 2021 the Town will reach the

provincial waste diversion goal of 60%. In 2014 the Town had a 46% residential diversion rate; diverting or recycling 1,677 tonnes of the total 3,630 tonnes produced.

It is beneficial to remove organic material from landfill to both save space and reduce landfill derived methane emissions, which will work to reduce the community's greenhouse gas production significantly.

Mayor McKean indicated that, "This program is essential to any community looking to create a sustainable future. I'd like to encourage everyone to take advantage of this program and support our waste diversion goal of 60%."

Gail Ardiel, Deputy Mayor said of this program, "We'd like to thank our residents for their support of recycling in The Blue Mountains. I believe the curbside yard waste and battery programs will be particularly helpful to residents and support our Town's goal of sustainability."

The Town is looking forward to initiating this new service with Miller Waste Systems (Miller) and will be working with Miller to coordinate an October 2015 roll-out. Residents should look for a new green bin to be delivered to their house during the month of September. The green bin will include a smaller container for the kitchen to capture waste organics as they are generated and will include a guide with details about each of the new programs.

Additional information will be communicated when program plans are finalized.

For further information contact:  
Jeffery Fletcher,  
Manager of Solid Waste and  
Environmental Initiatives  
519-599-3131 x238

## Report from BMRA Treasurer at AGM

by Terry Thompson-Director

I'm sitting in for our Treasurer, Peter Sharp, as he is away. We are still in good shape financially, with a \$12,000 GIC, same as last year.

Overall, assets are about \$6,000 lower than last year primarily due to expenses related to the election, where we hosted an all candidates meeting and incurred additional charges to update our website, as you can see on the attached statement of revenue and expenses.

### Memberships

We encourage existing members to spread the word and ask neighbours to join, as the strength of the BMRA is in its members!

In addition to regular family members we have 10 "condo memberships" and this extends our reach to additional ratepayers.

### Town Budget Review Committee

Your committee has been busy! Members of the group are John Leckie, Al Fraser, Boyd Marshall, Richie Baird, Janet Findlay and Brian Harkness.

Our report on the town budget as well as Water and Wastewater rates has been given fairly wide circulation and I assume you have read it in the newsletter as "Good News and Bad News"

Going forward we are encouraged by the appointment of Ruth Prince as director of finance and IT services, replacing Rob Cummings who left last June. She has been helpful to the committee and willing to work with us to understand the complexities of municipal accounting.

We continue to press the mayor to get back the additional \$700,000 owed to

us ratepayers from Grey County, and in turn to return it to taxpayers via a reduced tax levy. He and Gail did try hard.

On Water and WW we are pleased to see the rates essentially frozen for the next few years and are pressing for a reduction in future as we believe the analysis presented by the town is insufficient to support the current charges to you.

Below is an e-mail sent to the Mayor, John McKean and CAO, Troy Speck after our recent meeting:

Terry Thompson, Boyd Marshall and myself met with Ruth Prince and Sam Dinsmore as a follow up to Terry Thompson's earlier e-mails in Jan. and Feb. relative to:

1. Transfers made relative to the Water/Wastewater (W/W) surplus -Note 20 in the audited Dec.31st,2013 financial statements.

2. Review the various 2014 yearend transfers made in Report FIT.15.16

3. Discussion of reasoning behind using W/W reserve funds for purposes that do not seem to be related to W/W e.g. a staff proposal to fund a part of the \$335,000 Blue Mountain Resort Development Charge refund from W/W reserves and a proposal to subsidize the Teskey/Hoover wastewater tender from these same reserves.

As you are aware, the three of us are on the Executive Committee of Georgian View Estates Ratepayers Group as well as on the Budget Review Committee of the BMRA.

Without going into all the detail of the subject meeting, let me say that we were quite impressed with the knowledge and professionalism of Ruth Prince and Sam Dinsmore. Clearly

many of our queries related to the explanation of how Municipal accounting and its terminology differ from what we would refer to as GAAP accounting, so this was very helpful to us.

We had some interesting discussions relative to the concept of using W/W reserves as a funding source for non W/W expenditures and while it may be our view that there should be a By-Law that prevents same, just as the Municipal Act prohibits the use of Tax dollars to fund W/W operations, we focused more on "Policy" relative to the use of Reserve funds in general. In this regard, Boyd Marshall provided copies of the City of Waterloo's public Policy statements regarding the use of their said reserves along with useful definitions regarding reserves, reserve funds and obligatory reserves.

The point of this note is to make you and Mr. Speck aware of this meeting and our gratitude for Ruth Prince and Sam Dinsmore making themselves available to field our questions. We did suggest that it might be worthwhile for the Finance Group to give a Workshop to Council regarding W/W reserves and possibly discussing the benefits of developing public reserve Policy guidelines for our Town.

We strongly believe that it is important that "we" all work together, where our view of "we" is Council, Staff and Ratepayers and we are very pleased as I said earlier with the cooperation and assistance from the Finance & IT Group. We have thanked Ruth and Sam directly and offered to assist them if they feel there is an area where we can add value.

**Please pass this on to your  
neighbours and encourage them  
to join the BMRA  
[www.bmratespayers.com](http://www.bmratespayers.com)**

## Interview with Mayor John McKean

May 22, 2015

After 7 months on the job as Mayor, John McKean seems settled into a style of pragmatism. We won't expect any lurching, just steady incremental change and improvement on the issues he was elected upon. Our interview lasted about an hour and included the following dialogue:

**BMRA:** Why has the Windfall development application become such a hot button with residents??

**Mayor:** As I see it, the main issue is density. On that score, Windfall has developed adjacent single family and semi-detached projects with plans that go back to 2011. Now they are seeking approval of a medium density project on a parcel at Grey Road 19 and 21. This parcel was part of their original plan, and what needs clarification is whether the entire development has an acceptable density when taken as a whole. Thinking about medium density, I think Applejack in Thornbury is an example of a medium density project that looks good and fits in. But part of that is because the developer was prepared to spend on design and landscaping.

**BMRA:** In our concurrent interview with Town Planner Benner we agreed that the Deferred Zoning on this site and many others is too ambiguous, causing us grief because it so open ended and developers are able to constantly ask for the sun and moon.

**Mayor:** Yes. The "Deferred Development" land use designation is too ambiguous and in fact has been eliminated in the new draft Official Plan. The new Official Plan designations will make it clearer for all concerned: developers, Town staff, and of course, adjacent landowners and potential purchasers. (New home purchasers must

always look at the property around them when they invest to understand what could happen.)

**BMRA:** Do you expect bonusing to allow for new structures that would have been hard for any resident to anticipate, even had they done their homework?

**Mayor:** Well the bonusing that is being debated now is to try and rectify an ad hoc system that was allowed to become part of the give and take between the Town and developers for years. There is an argument that can be made to formalize that process with some basic rules that everyone understands going into a development. On the other hand it is fair to ask why are we entertaining bonusing, which some would call loopholes, when we have just barely put forward our new Official Plan (OP) to the County for approval. Maybe we shouldn't allow any changes to the OP for a couple of years until we get some experience with it...either we believe in the OP or we don't. The other problem with the old informal method of bonusing was that it was not paid up front. Bonusing only got paid when a project reached a certain threshold. So developers could stop just before that threshold and not have to pay. Maybe that is why we have so many incomplete projects. We have to think this thing through and be smarter about it.

**BMRA:** Will you consider having "town hall type" meetings at Council where residents can come forward with issues instead of having to formally prepare a deputation?

**Mayor:** Making it easy for ratepayers to approach the Town is crucial. But it isn't a productive use of time if a question comes before us for which we are frankly not prepared. We can't know everything ahead of time. So a compromise might be to simply get the ratepayer questions or comments into the Clerk in a short easy concise manner and then Council and/or staff

would be better prepared to discuss the issues in a "town hall" forum. We could try this out on the basis of one every two or three months to see if it improves dialogue with townsfolk and businesses.

**BMRA:** There has been continuing hand wringing over some Short Term Accommodation (STA) applications that might be approved and become a precedent or a slippery slope. Can you comment?

**Mayor:** *The short answer is that I am aware of some concerns but they seem to have gone away with property sales and I don't see anything to worry about currently.*

**BMRA:** Grey County? Any progress on your election campaign thrust?

**Mayor:** Yes! I think even the County realizes the roads costs are not sustainable under the current formulas. We can do our own road work more economically and that is win/win because the County can't keep throwing more money at it and keep us happy. So The Blue Mountains can take responsibility for all the roads in our municipality, maintain them more economically and more in keeping with our needs. Let me give you an example.

Recently on Grey Road 2 a new paved section was completed without bicycle lanes, so there is now a gap between sections of the road which have been properly paved. That is totally unacceptable to our destination economy. We want to build a solid reputation as being bicycle friendly and are proud of our Bicycle Friendly Community Silver Award. So we should simply do our own roads with less cost and better quality and consistency.

**BMRA:** What is your strategy for moving forward on taking responsibility for all roads?

**Mayor:** The Town sent a proposal to Grey County on May 9th and they have

90 days to respond. In it we said the situation is unsustainable and we want to take over the roads. The County had numbers for partial road downloading that would save \$600 thousand and double that if all the roads are downloaded. Our own staff think these estimates are conservative. So we expect it is in everybody's interest to go along with our proposal. The savings are real. If all municipalities did the same thing the County wouldn't even need a roads department. Hopefully others will follow our example. This will take time. My goal would be to make it all happen by July 2017.

**BMRA:** That seems a bit out there, why that date?

**Mayor:** Well it will take time to assume the roads. A lot has to be done. We are already doing some of it because as I said the County "forgot" to tell its staff to make bicycle lanes on Grey Rd 2 and we will have to do that ourselves now. Plus on that same road near the Kolapore Uplands the County simply stopped clearing out the snow in the parking lot. Again, we are a destination economy and that sort of thing is unacceptable to our tourist base. People can't park on the road because then the County would haul their cars away while they are skiing. So we figured out a way to clear the parking lot of snow, which was complicated by a \$5 million insurance requirement for the contractor, but it got done.

**BMRA:** Our new Deputy Mayor has some ideas on how to get better representation at the County relative to our funding contribution, now approaching almost 30% of the County budget. In other words change the tax base formula from population to property assessment. Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Mayor:** Well none of these changes will be easy but Deputy Mayor Ardiel may very well be onto something and it is worth pursuing.



**BMRA:** The tenders have come in on the Thornbury West End Road Improvement Project (Sobey's) request for quotes and are 22% higher than expected. Are we suddenly seeing padding going into tenders for some reason? Is the Town not getting fair quotes?

**Mayor:** TBM is not being singled out for higher quotes. I would suggest the following points need to be considered:

1. Prices are going up across the board. Collingwood is experiencing the same thing, as are other municipalities. So the \$600K increase, to be shared with the developer, is not really a surprise.
2. The bids are not being padded to compensate for simply having to deal with TBM's previously difficult bidding process (which we have addressed).
3. Contractors are not happy when tenders are cancelled after they have worked to deliver a bid. I am on top of that issue and it will cease to happen under my watch.
4. If tenders for infrastructure are going up across the Province. It might be due to kicking the can down the road after the fiscal/economic collapse of 2008. Therefore this new flurry of tenders could present a problem for asset management for all the municipalities. (By the way, TBM needs to get its asset management system in place and we hope that can happen with the help of our new technical engineer.)

### **BMRA Interview Follow-up**

The Mayor assured us he would continue to help us inform the Blue Mountain Ratepayers with these updates. A few days after our interview, a further update concerned the Town's approval of the west end Thornbury road improvements. This financial commitment from the Town is a significant example of how the new Council is

prepared to bite the bullet on a difficult dilemma and move forward with a modern food outlet plus LCBO store that will anchor the western end of the community and hopefully encourage more commercial investment in TBM.

## **Interview with Deputy Mayor Gail Ardiel**

June 5, 2015

After 7 months on the job as Deputy Mayor, Gail Ardiel is feisty and ready to take on the task of getting a better deal with the County. She seems to be prepared to spend some political capital on that and other issues. Our interview lasted about an hour and included the following dialogue:

**BMRA:** Regarding your Notice your Motion seconded by Councilor Martin and was carried; This Motion requested the County to change the method of voting by municipal representatives from a method of weighted voting by the number of electors, to a system weighted by assessment value. That is a very aggressive move that we support. Can you elaborate?

**Deputy Mayor:** Our MPAC assessment is \$3.7 billion that needs more weighting because new development happening in TBM actually requires more working capital and we are being depleted of that by the County. Ironically the more successful we are, the more funding we require for services etc. That motion currently sits at County on the Corporate Services Committee which Mayor John McKean sits on.

**BMRA:** What has been the reaction to that at County?

**Deputy Mayor:** Not surprisingly, resistance! They say that democracy should only be based on population and redistribution is justified. We responded that a helping hand is one thing but one municipality like TBM

trying to carry 8 that aren't as successful is flawed governance.

**BMRA:** So you are essentially saying that this is not a typical democracy representation issue because County members are not elected directly they are appointed, is that right?

**Deputy Mayor:** Exactly! Plus they are conflicted. They have to try every means possible to get their hands on TBM's funding ability. They are like Greece is to Germany.

**BMRA:** Are there concrete examples of the County behavior that is conflicted?

**Deputy Mayor:** An example of their lording it over us is the 50% issue that you have talked about at the BMRA AGM that the Mayor and I attended.

(Note: see concurrent comments by Director Terry Thompson under the AGM Budget Review Report in BMRA: We agree that is great example of how the County has been less than accountable, to put it mildly, on that issue. Withholding the misuse of our own money is appalling. That behavior justifies the need to switch from electoral votes to a method of assessment because the County simply won't return our own money even after admitting it is our money. What else can be done to set about making needed changes in governance?

**Deputy Mayor:** I am trying to come up with something to tack onto the current realignment of the electoral regions caused by the Feds going from 308 seats to 338 seats. Premier Wynne has said she will parallel that expansion. It will impact County structures because the ridings will change. I will have to have discussions with surrounding municipalities to see if there is any interest in being one region. I would also have to work with OSUM (Ontario Small Urban Municipalities) and AMO (The Assoc. of Municipalities of Ontario), to also get their support.

**BMRA:** That is a novel move. Let us know if we can help inform the ratepayers if that idea becomes a higher possibility. In fact, hasn't a more practical regional government structure been discussed in the past? Shouldn't our governance relate to our economy which in turn is driven by our geography, the Mountain and Georgian Bay? In other words, the Georgian Triangle?

**Deputy Mayor:** The process of looking at regional government would encompass something between Meaford, Collingwood, Wasaga Beach and Clearview. Dialogue actually started in 1998, with several municipalities, Collingwood and The Blue Mountains did form The Nottawasaga Joint Service Board which was my name suggestion. I think Georgian Triangle is too old fashioned. We don't have to use that name we can think of something later. The main thing is, as you say, to relate government structure to geography and the economy; not some artificial political boundary that might have made sense once upon a time for older economies.

**BMRA:** It is gratifying to see you being aggressive on several fronts to fix our governance. Switching topics: what do you think of bonusing and is Windfall a watershed moment insofar as density and height

**Deputy Mayor:** We have 4 stories already in the Village but they aren't on the edge of the development like Windfall proposes ...so far. But I agree with the Mayor that perhaps we need to consider living with the new Official Plan (OP) and get experience with that OP before offering loopholes and bonusing.

**BMRA:** There was a kerfuffle amongst Councillors pertaining to hearing deputations on the Windfall subject. Where do you stand on that?

**Deputy Mayor:** The Collingwood people, whom I actually know and have communicated with, had their say at least a couple of times at TBM and when they wanted to present again we asked if it was anything new. They said no. Their plan was simply to keep in front of us with this important issue. But we had already heard them and understood their issues. So I don't think we have a democracy issue. We have a time and productivity issue. I am always supportive of hearing "new" ideas from any our ratepayers.

**BMRA:** Going back to the County issue. Are you happy with the way they service our roads. Particularly bicycle lanes?

**Deputy Mayor:** The Mayor is very well versed on roads. We need to get aggressive on taking over our roads and saving ratepayers money. Maybe all municipalities should be doing that. We could set up a Public Private Partnership and do a better job at lower cost. At present we are trying to incorporate paved shoulders, but this is very expensive and you the tax payers are going to be the ones paying, but this does create Economic Development.

**BMRA:** Well that would be a battle. How far would you go? Would you for example bill the County for the 50% they owe us? That would appear as a receivable on the Town's books. If they don't pay, then would you withhold money we normally send them as an offset to that receivable?

**Deputy Mayor:** Yes I would be prepared to do those things. If we have to do that to get them to the

**BMRA:** Frankly you asked the only good question recently when Warden Eccles showed up at Council. Council seemed ill prepared for that meeting. Council needs to do more inter-communication, in revolving

groups of 3 at a time to get around the absurd Municipal Act which doesn't differentiate between private decisions ( we agree this should not happen) versus private discussion (which is necessary). Warden Eccles outmaneuvered Council even though it was 7 politicians to 1. The Warden, could have answered the last question but he stated it would go to Corporate Service, and the rest of Council should have known about the question as this was the Deputy Mayor Motion and no one else choose to speak about this important issue. The Warden then up and left as the Councillors had no more questions. Do you agree Council needs to get its act together on this County issue?

**Deputy Mayor:** Most certainly and that is why, as we discussed at the outset of this interview, that I am pushing my Motion to the County on vote weighting by elector to the assessment based.

**BMRA:** We are not a community if we don't have schools and hospitals. We have a concurrent interview going into our newsletter with Trustee Linda Hamill and a couple of quotes from the Mayor of Meaford on that high school which serves our TBM kids. What are your thoughts on the threat of that school

**Deputy Mayor:** We have to get innovative. I agree with Mayor McKean about moving some departments from the County in Owen Sound into the school to save it. And that spending \$12 million of taxpayer money on expansion in Owen Sound is crazy when we have excess space in our schools due to low enrollment, this can cause their closure.

**BMRA:** We don't have time to go into detail on big subject like Long Term Care but let's close with your thoughts on Rockwell Terrace renovation of a colossal \$11.5 million.

**Deputy Mayor:** That should not be a renovation. It should be a merger of 3 units into 2. Only one long term care is mandated by the province.

**BMRA:** More on that in the next newsletter thank you!

**Update:** Subsequent to the above interview Council has proceeded with the Dobbie Report, including the splitting of responsibilities in Planning and Infrastructure and going ahead with the 3 new hires. Mayor McKean commented that getting this structure in place is a necessary investment and will pay for itself if only by keeping TBM out of costly OMB hearings. Tim Dobbie, who has wide experience (was CAO in London and Burlington) confirmed that the comment by the Mayor on the OMB was valid.

## Interview with Councillor Michael Martin

June 8, 2015

**BMRA:** We have had a discussion with both the Mayor and Deputy Mayor regarding Deputation options and communications generally between the Town and Ratepayers as well as simple communication among Councilors themselves. How could these matters be improved?

**Councillor:** Well I think we should always err on the side of having more communication versus less. As an elected representative I feel that Council has a duty to listen to the ratepayers not only at election but as a continuing dialogue. For example, regarding the recent "Windfall Delegation"; this particular group of concerned citizens had been before us twice but wanted to make another deputation and were turned down, in spite of following all requirements for "Deputation Status". Some Councilors thought that the group had no new information. In fact they had: a response to the developer's prior

deputation and the consideration of a possible solution to the density issue as a compromise with the Developer, the Group and the Town.

**BMRA:** How did that not get dealt with if it was new information?

**Councillor:** It wasn't "dealt with". In fact some Councilors were blunt in re-assertion that they did not want further public input.

**BMRA:** There seems to be conflicting messages on this topic as you will see when we issue our interviews in the newsletter. We aren't accusing anyone of anything but like most problems... they all boil down to a lack of communication. So 2 questions: 1. How would you set up something simpler for Ratepayers than having to do a deputation? 2. How can Councillors talk to each other and get some consensus without violating the Municipal Act (which we think is a relic)?

**Councillor:** *Question 1:* I understand the frustration of the "Delegation Process" as being cumbersome and not accessible for all. This is particularly true for those who are familiar with a Ward system in which the Ward Councilor was the ratepayer conduit to Council. With this question, I think that Council could reserve a 30 minute free question period (stand up ask question) at beginning of Committee of Whole or Council meeting.

Of course there may be required some rules such as if Council doesn't have an immediate answer then the answer forth coming at a later date. Also the order of questions due to the time limitation. But at least this would be a start toward easy access and more public participation which was a significant election issue. Another accommodation is the calling of a Town Hall style of meeting every 3 months to hear and listen to ratepayers concerns as questions or comments

from the audience.

*Question 2:* This is more problematic as the legislative changes require in some instances that a discussion among a quorum of Councilors (in our case 4 members) outside an official Council meeting may in some circumstances be deemed as an illegal de facto Council Meeting. As some Councilors and others interpret this very strictly, the communication between each is materially limited. In my case I am open to any discussion as I do not think the legislation was meant to limit discussion between Councilors, as long as no decisions are made affecting Council business. All of that said, I agree with you there needs to be more group discussion. This was apparent in the visit of the County Warden.

Well I am aware that you, the BMRA, are upset about the way we seemed unorganized in Council about the visit by the Warden Eccles and you suggested we should have had our ducks lined up before he arrived. I agree. On the important issue of changing the County Voting System which is biased against "The Blue Mountains". This Municipality is responsible for almost 30% of county costs with hardly 10% of the population. Ms Ardeil (our county representative along with the Mayor) emphasized her Motion to change the voting based on assessment and not population: the greater the assessment then the greater number of votes. As I had supported Deputy Mayor Ardiel's motion in the first place and will continue to support the initiative, I felt additional comments were not warranted. Further, I reminded the Warden that in the County "Road Rationalization Study", we "The Town" wanted an answer to the proposal from "The Town" to assume all County roads within the Town. This assumption would save us hundreds of thousands of dollars and relieve our taxpayers from the burden of the road portion of the county budget. Further, the Warden acknowledged



from my inquiry into the "County of Grey Act" that in fact the legislation recognizes that amendments are in fact permitted. The fact that the Act recognizes amendments is very important in both initiatives of change to the voting system and assumption of County roads. (We have a talking point with "Queen's Park" as without Ontario consent these initiatives may fail.)

**BMRA:** We are glad you reminded us of that (in fact, we admit we are amateurs at following all this from the peanut gallery) but we still think Council should have had its ducks lined up and a more unified front shown that TBM wants a better deal with the County. So again, why don't you folks ever talk to each other before an event like that?

**Councillor:** I am open for discussion with all or any members of Council and with all ratepayers. My point of view is always from the perspective of a publicly elected representative of the ratepayers: I represent you and your issues. Thank you for providing time for this interview.

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## Interview with Town Planner Michael Benner

May 25, 2015

**BMRA:** It occurs to us one of the biggest hot buttons in the Town is the Windfall Development Project. We would have thought that the Official Plan (now before the County for approval) would have made it more predictable for developers and the Town Staff alike as to what kind of projects fit with the "character" of TBM. Can you comment on that?

**Michael Benner:** Even when the OP gets fully approved (which we expect to happen shortly after making some insertions that the BMRA recommended along with Staff items since I arrived); there are still some steps to be taken that will make predictability more likely.

**BMRA:** What steps are those?

**Michael Benner:** Well first let's look at the history as to why there were so many "Deferred" areas under the old zoning documents. They were developed in the 80's and 90's and Deferred areas were deemed such because it was not practical to service them, either because of financial hurdles or capacity limitations (not because of the pumping stations) but the old pipe delivering water, for example. They were deferred until solutions to that could be figured out.

**BMRA:** Would that be a reason why Clarksburg was never fully serviced?

**Michael Benner:** Yes and because the magnitude of the fix would require Provincial and/or Federal help to do so. That might be possible in time.

**BMRA:** So if we are to get to better predictability we need new zoning. When will that happen?

**Michael Benner:** We are on our 3rd draft now and expect to give Council something to review this

**BMRA:** That seems to coincide with the Strategic Plan that is commencing now. Do they complement

**Michel Benner:** Yes there is a lot converging right now. The OP is the guiding document and the Strategic Plan will drive the Zoning by-laws that need updating. Also the Urban Design Guidelines, which the BMRA wanted inserted into the OP along with descriptive words like "character" and "scale", are all more needed details which can "foster civic identity".

**BMRA:** It sounds to us as if we are on track to both you as the Town Planner and the Developers have more predictability on applications going forward, is that your take?

**Michael Benner:** Definitely! We will have much better and workable guidelines that illustrate the "small town

character and open space" that Residents expect their community to continue to replicate with new development. Windfall suddenly appeared on a lot of residents' radar because of its departure from that character. Also its scale and visual impressions got their attention.

**BMRA:** Does Windfall become an example of a kerfuffle that could be avoided if all our ducks were lined up now? In other words do you anticipate an OP with new Zoning and a Strategic Plan in place soon that would give a developer more predictability as to what is acceptable?

**Michael Benner:** Yes most definitely that is the path we are going down, a predictable direction.

**BMRA:** Does Windfall meet density requirements if we bundle all their pieces together? In other words it looks like 54 units per hector on parts of it but maybe only 15 if the aggregate space is used in the calculation.

**Michael Benner:** That is correct. But we also have to weigh in items such as: visuals (where on the property lines would the 4 stories be), traffic, noise etc. Those are issues Staff has not come to grips with yet.

**BMRA:** Thanks for the update. We are comforted to hear you are weighing all these factors and creating working guidelines that will preserve the character of TBM.

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## Interview with School Trustee Linda Hamill

May 25, 2015

**BMRA:** There seems to be a flood of events funneling down upon our school system these days - the possibility of elementary and secondary school strikes, a deficit budget, potential of bus strikes, possibility of school closures and cuts in Special Education. But can we start with some good news?

Are you noticing any positive changes since the election last fall in terms of the Bluewater District School Board?

**Linda Hamill:** First of all, this new Board of Trustees is very cohesive. Gone is the divisiveness the previous Boards may have had. This new Board of Trustees has a wealth of diverse experiences in education and educational related areas. Each Trustee states their opinion on issues based on that expertise, and votes according to their beliefs, consultation with community and their conscience on what is best for all the students in Bluewater.

**BMRA:** That is good news. OK, let's get on with the rest of the picture. What about this year's budget?

**Linda Hamill:** The Bluewater budget is very large - in the neighbourhood of \$197 million. Yet there is very little maneuverability in that budget. 80% is paid in salaries that are a contractual commitment. The rest is spent on classroom support, transportation, plant and operations and administration. For all practical purposes, we can do little to impact costs in the budget. More than when I was previously a trustee, there is very little we can do. As a trustee all I can do is make sure that the revenue received from the Ministry is wisely spent and that there are no efficiencies that Senior Board staff has not already found. We do all this keeping the educational needs of Bluewater students foremost in mind.

**BMRA:** What has happened with the Watson Report?

**Linda Hamill:** The Watson Report is a planning document that makes suggestions on how Bluewater District School Board can deal with excess space in our schools. Currently, about one out of three student spaces are not in use across the whole District. This excess space costs us money. The Ministry funding no longer helps us pay all the costs associated with unused

space so it has become imperative that we deal with excess space. The Board of Trustees is in the process of approving an Accommodation Review Policy. By Fall, we will be in a position to begin Accommodation Reviews of approved schools. The Policy, which will be released in the Fall, will tell everyone how the Accommodation Review will take place.

**BMRA:** Do you have options other than closing schools and bussing kids?

**Linda Hamill:** The Ministry is advocating Community Partnerships. The Board of Trustees will be meeting with interested community members in June to begin the discussion about possible partnerships between schools and the community. It is very encouraging that The Town of Blue Mountains' new mayor John McKean has been very vocal about advocating that the County use space in schools rather than Grey County proceeding with a \$12 million expansion of facilities at the County Office in Owen Sound. I think we need to look at modification of schools, perhaps shrinking them. Perhaps we can bring in more international students. We are open to exploring positive options.

**BMRA:** What are the next steps in terms of dealing with all this inevitable change?

**Linda Hamill:** The Accommodation Review will begin in the Fall. A schedule of Reviews will be drawn up. It is safe to say that within the next five years we will have a Review in our area. When a Review happens an Accommodation Review Committee will be formed consisting of parents in the schools being reviewed. There will be a way for interested community groups to have a say. There will be public meetings and there will be an opportunity for interested individuals to speak to the Board at a special meeting.

**BMRA:** Queen's Park has gotten itself into a terrible fiscal problem. How else has this impacted Bluewater?

**Linda Hamill:** We have had a decrease in Special Education funding. The Ministry changed the funding formula. Some school boards saw increased revenue for Special Education. We did not. Instead we have seen a reduction of \$1.5 million in our Special Education budget. This has resulted in a cut to Educational Assistant staff. But the needs of our Special Education students will still be met. It will look different than it has in the past.

**BMRA:** The move seems to be towards mega schools rather than small schools. Can small schools provide adequate programming for students?

**Linda Hamill:** In my opinion, students need to be educated in their home communities. A student who is bussed up to three hours a day is expected to perform just the same as a student who lives within a short distance of school. Bussing reduces the amount of time they have for sleep, extracurricular activities and part time jobs. For me, this impacts on their quality of education. Small secondary schools do work. These schools offer courses on alternate years rather than every year. Pathways are developed so students can get all the compulsory courses required for future educational endeavours.

**BMRA:** Thank you for the update. We will stay in touch so that we can continue to inform the voter as to what is happening to our community. Schools and hospitals are necessary if we consider ourselves a community and we do. We intend to survive and prosper even if large parts of rural Ontario do not. Finally, in an impromptu conversation Meaford's new Mayor Barbara Clumpus, we were pleased to hear a lot of passion about keeping the GBSS in Meaford open for the kids in our Community. She has a number of ideas to do it including: moving the library into the school building, attracting kids into excellent music programs and gearing up a French immersion program.