



THE VIEW FROM BLUE

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BOX 198, THORNBURY, ON N0H 2P0

APRIL 2016

3 BMRA COMMITTEES, 2 DEPUTATIONS AND THE OMB

Your BMRA Committees were busy and productive this winter. Brian Nelson of the Official Plan (O.P.) Committee presented a deputation to Council on Monday February 29th. Our arguments were persuasive and Council voted in support of our position to have any references to bonusing removed from the revised Official Plan, at least for now. There was absolutely no question that the strong public presence at Council in support of the BMRA made a big difference.

And on February 17th Budget Review Committee (BRC) member Brian Harkness made a presentation to Council in response to the 2016 proposed Town budget. The Committee is well-recognized for its detailed analysis of Town costs, and its deputation was commended by Council members.

Last but not least, our Short Term Accommodation (STA) Committee Chair, Terry Kellar, will be making a presentation to the Ontario Municipal Board on May 26 & 27 at the Town Hall with respect to a waterfront property on Highway 26 in the Craighleith area.

The Blue Mountains Ratepayers' Association is growing in numbers and influence, thanks to many of you who keep abreast of the issues and support our activities. Strength in numbers is why your BMRA is successful, paid memberships are the proof – don't forget to send in your \$25 and keep us the force we've become! New members always welcome!

OFFICIAL PLAN COMMITTEE REPORT

Co-Chairs: Janet Findlay, Brian Nelson

Bonusing: BMRA scores an important win in shaping the revised TBM Official Plan

Regular readers of the BMRA Newsletter will recall that the Town of the Blue Mountains Official Plan (adopted in 2007) is now being revised. The end of this long process is finally in sight, and we are expected

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BUDGET REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT

Chair: Terry Thompson

On February 17th Budget Review Committee member Brian Harkness made a presentation to Council in response to the 2016 proposed Town budget. The details of the presentation and an extensive News Update was sent via email to BMRA members at the end of February. If you did not see it, it is available on the BMRA website. www.bmratepayers.com

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The Blue Mountains Ratepayers' Association

is growing in numbers thanks to many of you who keep abreast of the issues and support BMRA activities – don't forget to send in your \$25 and keep us the force we've become! Form is included herein. New members and diversity always welcome! We are actively seeking members from the agricultural community, corporate business, and small business. Sign up online to renew or become a member www.bmratepayers.com and join us. Membership \$25.00

Why Be A BMRA Member?

- Strength in numbers = influence on government and community issues, paid membership is the proof.
- Membership means you can bring issues of concern to the attention of the Association and perhaps find like minded support.
- Represent the issues facing your neighbourhood or industry and make a difference.

Blue Mountain Ratepayers Annual General Meeting, Saturday, May 7th, Marsh Street Centre, Clarksburg Annual General Meeting Closed Session - for Paid Members Only

- 8:30 am Registration
- 9:00 am Meeting Starts - In addition to the formalities of the AGM our Guest Speakers will be BMRA members and Councillors Michael Martin and Michael Seguin.
- 10:00 am Short Recess

Open Session – Public Welcome

- 10:15 am Guest Program: Town Hall Interview Format, Mayor John McKean, Deputy Mayor Gail Ardiel
- 11:30 am Meet and Greet

OFFICIAL PLAN COMMITTEE REPORT

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to have an updated O.P. approved by Town and County Councils later this year.

On February 29, 2016, a special meeting of Council was held to direct town planning staff on how to handle density and bonusing – one of a few outstanding issues – in the revised O.P. Bonusing is a tactic that allows developers to exceed the density limits in the O.P. if they contribute public benefits such as park space or waterfront access, or often cash. It's used more commonly in large urban areas like the GTA, not so much throughout the rest of Ontario.

Bonusing is allowed in TBM under the current O.P., and the results have been mixed at best. Some benefits have been collected, but others are unrealized because developments aren't completed. Still others are questionable – club houses, for example, may have little or no value to the greater community.

It's also arguable that bonusing has allowed or even encouraged developers to come forward with large-scale, high-density projects that end up being highly controversial.

There are other problems with bonusing:

- No detailed bonusing policies or guidelines are yet available. Grey County asked for guidelines in its review of the revised O.P. Experts consulted by BMRA warned that municipalities must be very careful to define exactly how bonusing would work to minimize the risk of unrealized benefits and development projects that don't fit with community goals.
- The revised O.P. already envisions higher densities across TMB in order to allow for a greater mix of housing types, more affordable

options, and better use of existing infrastructure. The case for even greater densities through bonusing has not been made.

- The bonusing option recommended by Town Planning Staff would allow unlimited density through bonusing deals across TBM. Other options capped density for some parts of Town, while allowing unlimited density in Thornbury-Clarksburg.
- Bonusing raises some very basic questions about the integrity and fairness of the O.P. Why have density limits in the O.P. if they can be exceeded through bonusing deals?
- A major issue in TBM has been complexity, inconsistency and lack of participation by the public and Council in development approval processes – too much negotiation by staff. Allowing bonusing deals has certainly not helped to create a fair and transparent planning process.

For all these reasons BMRA lobbied TBM Council to eliminate bonusing from the revised O.P. Co-Chair Brian Nelson presented a deputation at the Special Meeting of Council on Monday February 29th. Our arguments were persuasive and Council voted to have any references to bonusing removed from the revised Official Plan, at least for now. There was absolutely no question that the strong public presence in the Council Chambers on February 29th made a big difference.

The bonusing issue is not dead however, since Council also directed staff to prepare detailed bonusing guidelines for consideration as a possible future Official Plan Amendment. This means BMRA will have to monitor this issue carefully, but it also means that any future attempt to introduce bonusing will be subject to a full public review.

There will be another public meeting to review all final changes to the revised Official Plan before it is approved.

Residents should have a look at what the permitted densities will be near them, along with all the related policies to control design, buffering, etc. It looks like the "as of right" densities in some Recreational Residential areas of Town will go from 5 units per hectare in the old O.P. (typically estate lots, but with bonusing available) to 10 units per hectare (single detached homes, with no bonusing) in the new O.P. Maximum densities allowable in Thornbury and Clarksburg have been and will continue to be very high, so those related policies will be very important.

Finally, one of the last issues to resolve before the revised O.P. is approved will be the wording of those sections that refer to Short Term Accommodation. BMRA will be looking to make sure STA policies in the O.P. are consistent with the STA By-Law.

GREY COUNTY AND THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

John Leckie

Action Plan for a BETTER DEAL WITH THE COUNTY

Mayor John McKean and Deputy Mayor Gail Ardiel, our Town's reps at Grey County, have succeeded in persuading the County that it is in our mutual interest in having TBM assume responsibility for Grey County roads within our jurisdiction. Discussion are well underway and on April 4th TBM staff will be presenting to the Committee of the Whole their suggested roll out plans.

Assuming the details are satisfactory, TBM and the County might simply digest that road project, and we may be able to avoid looking further for better value for our County tax dollars. But as a hedge against the possibility that we don't like the details in the roads deal, here are some things that the BMRA and Council may have to consider, based on several discussions over the last few months.

It is important to stress to the County Council that they benefit directly, and indirectly, from the Town's success as a "cash cow" - a source of steady income for the County. This comes about not only because the Town is one of the few locations in rural Ontario that is thriving and growing its tax base, but also because it creates jobs for the neighbouring locales.

A great many of the building trades drive here daily from their homes in Grey County. And much of the maintenance in the way of landscaping, gardening, and snowplowing is performed by people in all the other 8 municipalities of Grey County as well. There is an old saying: "A rising tide lifts all ships". So as the economic tide lifts our Town, all boats in the region rise with it. Prosperity benefits all. The point is: it is in the interest of the County office in Owen Sound as well as the other 7 municipalities to work together to optimize the good fortune of TBM's destination and agri-tourism economy.

But as the Budget Review Committee indicates, TBM Ratepayers may be staring in the face a roughly 10% increase in expenses and thus taxes in 2017 and beyond. We used to benefit from blending down by the County but as the Mayor says, that is not reliable to count on in the future. That blending down is "unsustainable".

Here are some items that we think the County could contribute to TBM in order to improve our fortunes as a destination economy, which as mentioned above would ensure we remain a "cash cow" to help other parts of the County remain sustainable. The County could:

1. Fund recreational and cycling amenities.
2. Consider ways of better addressing attainable housing needs in TBM, including providing renovation grants for secondary suites and home ownership assistance loans.

3. Give us the remaining funds owed to us of \$750,000 of the \$1.5 million returned by the Province

4. Reconsider our Mayor's Facebook comments, following:

- Jan 12th - Grey County Committee meeting the vote was to keep the status quo regarding the weighted vote system. This gives some municipalities an unfair advantage when it comes to the decision making process. I believe it should be 1 councillor = 1 vote similar to other counties and gives everyone an equal say. Very disappointed.

- Feb 2nd - At Grey County Council the task force regarding the new administration building presented their latest floor plan as well as the cost estimate. This new building is projected to cost over \$12 million. County tax payers will pay \$800 thousand + each year for the next 15 years, which equates to a 1.5% tax increase to the county portion of your tax. (We are aware these numbers move around because the County has already started to collect).

5. Consider locating new capital projects, like long-term care facilities, closer to TBM in the interest of fairness.

6. Finish repaving Road 119

7. TBM is considering putting through a motion to take us to a Tier 1 municipal level. But a discussion on that is beyond the scope of this newsletter and perhaps we can avoid draconian measures if we can all agree on the "all boats rise together" concept discussed above.

Much of what we are setting out here concurs with what you would find if you googled Page 3 of the Grey County Transportation Master Plan, where County staff actually agree with TBM that the present County Road System is unsustainable; to which our Mayor

(who you will recall is a "roads guy" in his prior life) says: "our approach on roads is simply ahead of the curve, it is going to happen throughout Southern Ontario".

In conclusion, by investing in the Town of the Blue Mountains, we can all win, the County and the 9 municipalities, particularly from the new growth opportunities in the agri-tourism business. We look forward to the Town assuming responsibility for all Grey roads within the TBM, and as we are become more confident that we can be masters of our own destiny regarding roads, we see the need to represent the interests of two groups uniquely affected...cyclists and our agricultural businesses. We would welcome the participation of those who wish to have a say in this important Town service.

SHORT TERM ACCOMMODATION COMMITTEE REPORT

Chair: Terry Kellar

For an issue that was thought solved with the Short Term Accommodation Bylaws and the Licensing regime, there continues to be concerns and activity.

OMB Hearing Delayed:

The Town of the Blue Mountains requested and was granted a delay in the planned March hearing regarding a water front property on Hwy 26 in the Craighleith area. The site, which abuts a similar building granted a legal non-conforming status as an STA, was built after the relevant Bylaw was passed and has since been operating as an STA. The location is known as Aqua West and is at 209533 Hwy 26.

The owner has requested a zoning change and approval for an STA licence that would include numerous exemptions to the regulations. When his application was denied by Town Council he proceeded to appeal to the OMB, a costly measure for the Town.

The STA Committee Chairperson, Terry Kellar, will be making a presentation to the OMB Board at the rescheduled dates of May 26 & 27 at the Town Hall. All interested residents are encouraged to attend.

Response from MPP Jim Wilson:

As mentioned in the Fall 2015 BMRA newsletter;

Conservative MPP Tim Hudak introduced a Bill to the legislature that included a brief section on short term accommodation. Bill 131, called 'The Opportunity in the Sharing Economy Act', suggested that no municipalities should have the authority to restrict STAs. Several of the STA committee members personally contacted the Premier, Tim Hudak, other party leaders and our MPP Jim Wilson. The Town, via a letter from Mayor McKean, also contacted the above in addition to the other communities in Grey County. In addition, the STA Committee did contact Mr Wilson separately requesting his support.

In early March Mr. Wilson did respond to the BMRA indicating he would not be able to support the bill as it is currently written. In addition he stated "As Opposition House Leader, I can tell you that the government has given no indication that it is interested in seeing Mr. Hudak's bill go any further". The BMRA will continue to monitor any action on this Bill.

STAs in Our Downtown:

On March 21 seven STA Committee members attended the Town Committee of the Whole to listen to a deputation from 2 downtown business owners, one from the new Corner Cafe, and an adjacent business owner. Renovations to the new Cafe includes 3 apartments upstairs which would be rented out on a short term basis as well as there is consideration for an apartment in the adjacent property. In addition the deputation noted that a business owner across the street

already has an operating STA above an office.

The deputation reviewed the benefits to tourism, downtown Thornbury businesses and the Town in general to have STAs in the downtown (C1 zone) non-residential area. The reason the BMRA STA committee is following this is because a lot of effort has gone into defining STAs and regulating them in residential areas. The Ratepayers want to see continued improvement in this process and ensure the new licensing program is working. In short, we are monitoring this to make sure something doesn't get passed that causes a "slippery slope" into other areas that are seeing progress.

The discussion by Council and staff at the end of the presentation confirmed

that STAs are not currently allowed in a C1 Zone (as it was not included in the STA allowable zones) but a zoning change request and STA applications could be submitted. A Public meeting would probably be held at that time.

The Committee had contacted the Bylaw department to request confirmation as to the current legality of STAs in the downtown. A file was opened at that time. We like that this proposal would place STAs in a non-residential zone however more information and investigation are required prior to a decision on this use.

BMRA will also be monitoring the changes to the revised Official Plan underway to ensure that STA policies in the Official Plan are consistent with the STA By-Law.

BMRA Membership Application

Annual Family Membership fee of \$25 valid until December 31st

Apply online at www.bmraterpayers.com or

Please enclose a cheque for \$25, payable to BMRA and mail the cheque and application form to:

Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association
Box 198, Thornbury, ON NOH 2P0

1st Member Name: _____

2nd Member Name: _____

TBM Address: _____

City _____ Postal Code _____

Phone # _____

1st Email _____

2nd Email _____

Mailing Address:
(if different from above) _____

City _____ Postal Code _____

Phone # _____

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

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

Can you recommend anyone that may wish to join?

Name/Address

Open Letters Regarding the L. E. Shore Library

#1 To the Community of the Town of The Blue Mountains and our valued library patrons following a press release dated March 8th. Written by Terri Pope, CEO, L. E. Shore Library.

I would like to take this opportunity to respond to concerns about news that we are restructuring our library services.

Let me step back and explain what news was given to staff and then why we are restructuring our library services.

We informed staff March 8th that our Board will be taking over the management of the Craigeith Heritage Depot. We explained that the decision was made following an organizational review of our current library structure and services carried out by the Southern Ontario Library Service. The purpose of the review was to identify ways that we can provide better service to the community and incorporate the Depot into our structure.

As a result of the review, and the coming changes to the services that we offer, we have identified the need for nine new roles within the library, each of which will have different duties and responsibilities than what exist in our current structure. We do not intend to reduce the number of jobs within the library, but we will be changing the scope and content of the roles to better reflect a library service of our size and to be able to staff the museum. Unfortunately, that means that the staff assignments that we have right now will no longer exist in the new structure.

We believe that we have treated staff with dignity and respect. We spoke with each staff member individually and were transparent about the review process, the proposed restructuring and the elimination of current roles within the library. We provided each staff member with an outline of the new roles within the library, and we have encouraged each of our staff to consider the new positions and to apply for those roles that interest them.

The target date for completion of the restructuring activity is early May, at which time the new roles will be implemented. As we move through this process, library service will not be interrupted.

The restructuring will allow us to continue to offer the same great programs that we do now and offer new services through the Depot. The Depot's core function will be to act as a Museum but we will also be offering library services such as material drop off or pick up, and a browseable collection including popular fiction and DVDs.

We appreciate all of the interest in our library. People are passionate about it. We would like to keep our Facebook Page open to continued dialogue and we value constructive feedback to our programming. However, we reserve the right to remove offensive comments.

I hope that this letter has helped clear up some of the confusion and concerns you may have and I am open to continuing the conversation. If you have any further questions or concerns please direct them to me as matters related to the library are my responsibility.

Respectfully, Terri Pope, CEO

#2 From the SOS L.E. Shore Library, a group of concerned citizens, library patrons, and taxpayers. Submitted by Paul Wilson and Roland Gosselin, co-chairs, 519-599-2244, pwilson@gbtel.ca

As many of you have heard, the L.E. Shore Library in Thornbury is in the midst of a crisis we believe concerns everyone in The Town of The Blue Mountains.

On March 8, on the pretext of holding a "Staff Development Day," the library was closed and the staff of nine full and part-time librarians were handed letters of termination by an HR representative of the town, Jennifer Moreau, and the library's CEO, Terri Pope. The justification for such drastic and humiliating action, in the words of a "fact sheet" later released by the library (and apparently crafted by a Mississauga-based public relations firm, Redbrick Communications) was that the library was "transitioning to a new organizational structure to take on management of the Craigeith Heritage Depot, while putting in place staffing roles that are in keeping with a library of our size."

Most concerned library users were not fooled by such bland PR language, nor by assurances that the fired staff members could reapply for new staff positions in the

"reorganized" library. A Facebook group in support of the library staff quickly acquired more than 800 followers; a public meeting in front of the library on March 19 attracted several hundred protesters; petitions demanding the reinstatement of the staff, and the dismissal of the CEO, have been circulating. And at a special library board meeting held at the library on March 22, a standing-room-only crowd heard depositions from five concerned citizens asking the board to clarify their position on the firings and the restructuring of the library, and requesting that the deadline for the staff to reapply be extended.

Since then, although the reapplication deadline has been moved up to 4:45 pm on April 1st and the library board chairman, Olav Vanderzon, has resigned, there has been no response whatsoever from the board; the staff remain in limbo, their jobs in jeopardy; and the plans for restructuring are apparently still moving ahead, despite widespread public concern.

It is our opinion that, for the quickest and fairest possible solution, the matter of staffing and the matter of the Heritage Depot restructuring need to be treated as two separate issues. First, the staff must be immediately be reinstated. Once this happens, the restructuring of the library can be assessed and discussed in a cooler, more rational atmosphere.

There are hopeful signs that some members of the town council are beginning to think this way. In a story posted March 28th on Simcoe.com, Councilor Joe Halos, urging sober second thought, is quoted as saying, "I don't think we should have had a wholesale firing of everybody to restructure. Simple as that. I don't like seeing people lose their jobs and feel this could have been handled differently."

And Councilor Michael Seguin said: "If the opportunity presents itself, I'm sure we'll do the right thing. Make some changes or stop the thing or let's have another look at this whole thing and see whether or not we can proceed in another direction."

Please write the Council and encourage them to find a way to reinstate the library staff, and once this is done, to conduct a thorough, public review of the library restructuring. We believe this is the best way to prevent a bad situation from becoming even worse.

BUDGET REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT

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We are pleased that the presentation was well received by Council, striking a positive note of support to Council and staff in their efforts to get a "better deal" from the County.

On March 7th Council approved the 2016 budget. On an overall basis, the increase in taxes you can expect for 2016 is a modest 1.79% blended rate (Town, County and Province). Over many months we know a great deal of work is done by staff and Council struggles with many conflicting priorities to produce the final budget.

Focusing on just the Town's budget, we were a bit disappointed to see that the February 24 Committee of the Whole staff report (see FAF.16.24 on Town website) totally ignored the point we raised about Town costs increasing 8.4% from 2015 to 2016. We will continue to emphasize the point, as it is key to budget presentation and better understanding by both Council and ratepayers.

As noted in previous newsletters and again in the latest presentation, the current process at the summary level of reporting goes from budget to budget. This masks, in our view, the real increase in what the public and Council is shown. Specifically, the staff report shows the 2016 budget increase in Town costs is 2.79% over the 2015 budget while the increase in actual costs from 2015 to 2016 is 8.4%.

The differing view in presentation is clear and we remain hopeful that the process will be modified, and note that, back in December, Council agreed to review this process for the upcoming 2017 budget. We plan to continue our dialogue with staff, suggesting that perhaps showing both numbers for 2017 as a way of transitioning to an agreed upon presentation at the overall summary level.

The 2016 budget included a new 2%

tax, proposed to cover anticipated future capital expenditures. We expressed our opposition to the new tax on the basis that it had not been brought forward with a plan to assess overall asset replacement needs and the necessary policies and controls over resulting reserves.

As we mentioned, on March 7th Council approved the 2016 budget, including the 2% tax. Unfortunately, it will not be funded from the 2015 surplus of over \$500,000 as we had hoped, but will be funded from 2016 tax revenues.

Hemson, the consultant hired to review town assets (not including water and wastewater which are covered by separate, dedicated reserves) suggested up to \$7.5 million in 2016 may be needed to fund Town assets replacement. Your Budget Review Committee (BRC) will require further analysis and understanding of the assumptions underlying the consultants report before supporting this new tax. We look forward to continuing discussion with staff on this item and hopefully coming to a mutual agreement on the level and sustainability of the tax and a policy to control the resulting reserves. Ruth Prince, Director of Finance, advised that she plans to bring a new policy covering this to Council in May and looks forward to continuing the dialogue with the BRC.

Regarding water and wastewater: a positive note. The 2016 approved budget for consumption rates and fixed rates is set at the same rate as last year - no increase!

In closing, we want our members to know that the primary focus of the BRC remains on the analysis of town costs and related issues, including water and wastewater rates and reserves. These are items that are under the control and direction of Council with staff support and recommendations.

We are also very aware of the large impact County taxes have on ratepayers

tax bills and the overall sustainability of the tax load on ratepayers. There is a pressing need to get a better deal from the County. However, this is more of a strategic issue and will be dealt with by a separate committee of the BMRA board, as discussed elsewhere in the newsletter.

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Call for membership info, or visit the website and click on

JOIN NOW today!

You are important to us and we value our relationship with you as members of the BMRA. We share information, opinions and provide news on various issues of concern in The Blue Mountains.

Please pass this on to your neighbours and encourage them to join the BMRA
www.bmrateratepayers.com