



BLUE MOUNTAIN RATEPAYERS' ASSOCIATION

"Protecting the Interests of the Community"

Electronic-Newsletter (Volume 17, September, 2011)

FALL EDITION



SEPTEMBER, 2011

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

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT – IS THERE A ROCKY ROAD AHEAD?

By Michael P. Seguin

I hope everyone had a safe and enjoyable summer. The heat was certainly on and now we can look forward to a chilling fall and winter season of tax debate.

On May 28th, our AGM at the Blue Mountain Resorts was well attended by 63 members, and our guest speakers, MPP Jim Wilson, Deputy Mayor Duncan McKinlay and COO Dan Skelton from the Resort provided us with some interesting perspective on many issues and events

affecting our local ratepayers. I can also report that the BMRA Board gained 4 new members for 2011/2012: Denis Fennessy, (Craigleith), Paul Mitchell (Thornbury-Clarksburg), Bill McKetrick (Thornbury-Clarksburg) and Kim Posen (Craigleith). This will undoubtedly add strength to the BMRA decision-making process and will provide great representation from both the east and west portions of The Blue Mountains.

On May 29th, the Town held a Community Volunteer Awards ceremony at the new Town Hall to express their appreciation of the volunteer efforts of many residents in making “life extraordinary in our community”. The invitation was extended to our Board members and both Lester and I attended on behalf of the BMRA.

In June, The Blue Mountains ended its search for a new CAO and appointed Troy Speck, a person with great credentials in the municipal world (see News Around Town). Both Lester Posen and I met with Mr. Speck at the beginning of this month to discuss an open communication between the Town and our Association and to work towards providing a better life experience for our members, our residents, our businesses and to those that look at our town from beyond our borders. In my opinion, the meeting went well and I was quite impressed with his desire to speak openly and listen to us.

On the building front, as you probably already know, the new Town Hall is now open for business and everyone is welcome to visit and provide their honest opinions – how do you feel about this building and location? On the flip side, the old town hall still awaits its fate. Three proposals for re-use of this building have been received by the town – as a fitness centre, an animal shelter or a centre for sustainability. A steering committee must now be formed to evaluate these proposals – state tuned for the results!

The long awaited and much anticipated Community Health Centre in Thornbury is also now open for patient-care. We are advised that by the end of the year, the building will be occupied by 4 family doctors and the Thornbury Physiotherapy Clinic. Hopefully, everyone in the community will now have access to a family doctor and the Meaford Hospital will be better served for emergency purposes.

The Official Plan Review continues with a second workshop scheduled for September 22nd. I plan to attend this workshop and others (if permitted) in order to ensure that the OP reflects the needs and aspirations of our community. The next session is focusing on the identified theme of Growth Management, Intensification, Transportation and Design.

On the financial front, the town is planning to focus on the 2012 budget and will be deliberating a number of major challenges including the existing service delivery and enhancement of both essential and non-essential services. The two biggest challenges will be the “huge” financial costs and tax impositions associated with “Long Term Solid Waste Disposal Needs” and the “Water Financial Plan”. The proposed tax implications of these two issues alone will be enough to force many seniors and low income earners to move away from a community that will now become “unaffordable” to live in. The details of these two challenges will be forthcoming in our web site blasts and ***I cannot emphasize how important it is for you to get involved and voice your concerns.*** In my opinion, there will be need for the full Council to hold open public meetings to debate these challenges in addition to the non-effective and poorly attended Public Information Sessions (PICs).

Finally, it appears that the town is becoming more concerned about the collection of overdue infrastructure charges and the depletion of their reserves. A number of neighbourhoods are now being forced to pay “huge costs” for the installation of water and/or sanitary sewers as well as upgrades to the treatment plants and roads, in general. Of course, the question on every property owner’s mind – are they fair, reasonable and affordable?

Is there “a rocky road ahead”? Well from where I sit (which is at most Council and Committee Meetings), there will be a “dead-end for many and a need for direction to help others keep them on the path of affordability.

As I have said many times before, our mission statement is clear and the BMRA will continue to monitor the direction of this Council and make sure they are “charged” and responsible to act in the best interest of this community. We will also continue to keep you informed through our new social network: twitter and facebook.

If you have any comments regarding my statements, please do not hesitate to contact me through the web site (info@bluemountainratepayersassociation.com) 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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THE MAILBAG

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

SUBJECT: BUDGET TIME

Seems like only yesterday that we all watched the 2011 budget debate unfold and turn into the most disappointing one of the past 8 years. Only the leadership of Council was satisfied with the results.

Council met in special session to plan a more effective 2012 effort and after a long debate came up with the idea of having committees review all Dept. budgets before sending them to the full Council. Will this new method solve last year’s problems?

The 2012 budget will be a challenge for Council, to say the least. With issues like the landfill site, the water rates, enforcement of the STA by-laws and the OMERS pension shortfall, Council will be hard pressed to keep tax increases within reason.

Will the last few years of overspending our development reserve funds and a \$1.0 million deficit in the Building Department catch up with Council? That is the big question?

This Council will need to take a sharp knife to spending in order to keep our fiscal house in order. Will they do that? Your guess is as good as mine.

AT LEAST THAT'S THE WAY I SEE IT

Paul Mitchell

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

SUBJECT: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The Town of the Blue Mountains (TBM) has become the all encompassing name for a number of our communities in the area. It is a good name but one we have to be careful how it is applied. Our new Town Hall proudly memorializes all of the towns and villages comprising the TBM and we should be pleased to see our individual communities remembered in this way. The TBM is now a “community of communities”. Over the next few years there may well be moves to harmonize the TBM name to the detriment of the names of the individual communities.

We have to take great care to preserve the history of the many individual parts of the TBM. “A community without a history is a community without a soul”. We have many citizens of the TBM

who are rightly proud of their area's history and values. They want to maintain their ancestral memories. Their communities were built and developed by special individuals who worked hard with the tools of the day to create their villages and towns. We as the citizens of today inherit their diligence and benefit greatly from the heritage left to us. In so many ways they were our benefactors.

When we remember our benefactors a case in point is the wonderful L. E. Shore Memorial Library facility which has contributed so much to our community. It is the only library in the TBM. It was made possible only by the generosity of a special individual – Mr. Shore. The Library Board must take great care to forever preserve Mr. Shore's memory in the day to day operating policies in terms of the web site, letterhead and other communications materials in use. Our area is blessed with several other generous individuals who contributed land or financially to facilities for our children to use. Preserve forever the names of our community builders, our villages and towns. Celebrate our heritage!

John Greenhough

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WATER

Objectivity, Transparency.... and then there's Political Fiddling

By Ron Hartlen

Wouldn't it be nice if services were billed to accurately reflect their actual cost, and if the public understood and accepted this? That would put an end to whining and complaining about it "not being fair", and that "I'm paying more than my fair share". Unfortunately it seldom works that way; there's usually some degree of arbitrary political fiddling. Let's look at a few examples.

Consider Market-value Residential Property assessments. Now there's a quagmire! How many times have you heard people whining about their property taxes having increased because of an assessment increase. All over the country, local authorities are pressured to implement various "fiddles" such as capping assessment for tax calculations, limiting the rate of increase of taxes, and treating long-term homeowners more favourably than come-from-away newcomers. In reality, even if your assessment increases and your taxes do increase, *your individual share of the total residential tax revenue could actually decrease.* How come? Well if a large number of high-value homes are added to the rolls, their high taxes will actually lead to a reduction in your share of the total. Clarity and transparency is really important here. We should know, in accurate detail, how much of the tax increase is attributable to increased assessment and how much is attributable to increased municipal spending. Political fiddling to appease and favour one group at the expense of another is absolutely the wrong thing to do. It will distort the real-estate market and be grossly unfair to somebody. If we're doing market-value assessment we should do it uniformly and transparently. If someone needs a break, that's OK. In special cases, it could be done, for example, by simply by accruing "taxes owing" against the value of the home, credited to the Municipality, and payable at the first change of ownership. No fiddling required!

Now closer to home in Ontario, let's look at "time-of-use-billing" for electricity. TOU billing, by the way, is absolutely the right thing to do! The pricing signals will reduce the load during peak periods, thus reducing the size of the generation system required, also reducing the need for peak-time energy from fossil sources. There's no downside. But the Conservative Party's election platform would make time-of-use-billing for electricity "optional". Allowing customers to "choose" is all wrong: *those who are using power at peak times will get a price break, at the*

expense of those who are doing the right thing. So the same Conservative Party that, thankfully, plans to do away with the misguided and politically-motivated Green Energy Act and Feed in Tariff program (a.k.a throwing money down a bottomless black hole) is doing some fiddling of its own, and thereby eroding its credibility with objective, thinking voters. Too bad.

Getting really close to home, consider billing for the water system in TBM. There is no escaping the provincially-mandated requirement to accumulate funds to maintain the system into the future. All we can ask of our technical staff is to make sure they don't underestimate the current state and life of the system, and maintain it effectively, so as not to overestimate the funds required in future. That's a given. But how should TBM bill us to raise the funds? *Well, it seems quite obvious that this is all about system, not delivery.* So doesn't it follow that the funds should be raised from system charges with virtually nothing from billing for consumption? If you listen carefully, you might hear someone whining already at the mere suggestion! There may also be an issue of how to bill long-time users versus new users. Here's a thought. Broadly speaking it's the long-time users who have been getting a bit of a "free ride" for years. This was not by their own explicit choice of course, but as a result of the course chosen by their representatives. But the inescapable outcome is that if any group should contribute more it's long time users. Now surely you can already hear some animated whining at this suggestion! Our Council will have to deal with this issue. Will there be some fiddling? Probably at least a bit. If so, somebody will be paying part of somebody else's fair share.

The views expressed above are of course based upon personal opinion. No doubt some readers will agree and some will disagree, to various degrees. The intent here is simply to stimulate some thinking about it. Would you prefer council to lean strongly toward the objective, transparent route, or would you be satisfied with significant political fiddling? It's your money.

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OMB DISMISSES APPEAL OF STA BY-LAWS

By: Lester Posen, Vice President – BMRA

The Decision

On June 22, 2011, the OMB issued their ruling in support of the Town in the case of the challenge to the Official Plan and Zoning By-Law as well as the Interim Control By-Laws for Short Term Accommodations (STA's).

In her ruling, Mdme. K.J. Hussey, Vice-Chair, wrote: "There is convincing evidence of incompatibility and convincing evidence that the integrity and character of the low density residential neighbourhoods are being undermined by the presence of STA units in those areas. These are legitimate concerns to which the Municipality has turned its attention appropriately. The Board finds that the proposal is a reasonable response to the situation and represents good planning."

This ruling provides confirmation of the direction taken by the Town on behalf of the residents to provide planning and zoning that serves both business and resident to reduce the conflict between these uses. In the case of STA's, there is provision for their operation in the Town via the Official Plan and the associated Zoning By-Laws.

The hearings lasted approximately 2 weeks spaced over several months during which time the Town, as well as the Appellant, provided a great deal of evidence. The ruling also included some recommended changes to the Official Plan as well as changes to some Zoning By-Laws. It is important to note that an Appellant, Denis Martinek and Tyrolean Village Resorts concurred with changes recommended by Blue Mountain Resorts and Intrawest, a party to the

proceedings and not an Appellant. The only Appellant not able to resolve their concerns in these matters was Sheldon Rosen and The Lodges at Blue Mountain.

Where Do We Go From Here

What does this decision mean? That is an interesting question that many of you have been asking. What it should mean is that the Town has valid by-laws that it can enforce. STA's that started to operate after the date of the first interim control by-law in areas not zoned for these businesses are in contravention of the law. The Town now has the laws on the books, which they can enforce against these illegal operations.

Further, those STA's that were operating prior to these by-laws will have the ability to continue to operate under specific conditions. These operations would be considered non-conforming uses. Once the property either changes hands or the owner stops using the property for an STA, in these cases, then the property must conform to the zoning by-laws. All of this being said, our system allows for continuous challenge to the rulings that take place inside of our lower courts and in this case by the OMB. The Appellant has made application for 'Leave to Appeal'. In this case an application by the Appellant is before the courts appealing this decision. The decision for the appeal will reside with a judge who will rule on whether the appeal can proceed. If the Appellant is allowed to appeal then this case will be heard in a court before a judge. The process will take some time as our judicial system and the timetables of the parties can ensure that this process takes a long time.

In any event, the Town now has laws on the books that it can enforce. There is no impediment stopping the town from enforcing these laws. The town must establish penalties associated with these laws and enforce these by-laws equally and as vigorously as they enforce all other by-laws.

You can read the full text of the OMB decision and all relevant information at the Town website. If you are reading this from the BMRA electronic newsletter, click on this link: <http://bit.ly/pooo2S>. As well as the Town's report regarding the Appellant's leave to appeal the ruling on the Town website. If you are reading this from the BMRA electronic newsletter, click on this link: <http://bit.ly/oE60CL>.

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NIMBYISM – HEADACHE OR HEARTACHE?

By Michael P. Seguin

I was really taken back (overly delighted) by Publisher, Jeff Shearer's editorial "Rethinking NIMBYism" found in the Summer Edition of On the Bay magazine. This is a must read!

As President of the Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association, I continuously hear this expression applied to the many issues that we debate on behalf of the ratepayers. I agree with Mr. Shearer, that it's "high time to rethink this demeaning term and its suggestion of selfishness".

Bureaucrats must realize that they are hired to work in the best interests of the community, and not the advocates of profit-seeking ventures, and must recognize local heroes that speak up about the threats to their community. The concept of NIMBYism may be a "headache" to the decision-making process but it's a "heartache" to the many people who are threatened, standing up for themselves. I also agree with another Mr. Shearer statement that "Without NIMBY's, imagine how many wrongs would be perpetrated on our communities because no one asked

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*The **Blue Mountain Watershed Trust Foundation** was incorporated in 1995 and is composed of independent watersheds that originate in the Niagara Escarpment (a United Nations World Biosphere Reserve) and drain directly into Georgian Bay. Major watersheds include Silver Creek, Black Ash Creek, Townline Creek, Pretty River and Batteaux River. In 1998, our watershed area was extended west to include Indian Brook and Beaver River and their tributaries. Our area of interest forms a rectilinear shape bounded by the Georgian Bay shoreline to the north and the highlands of the Niagara Escarpment to the south — an area totaling approximately 50,000 hectares.*

The Silver Creek Wetland represents a significant part of our natural heritage... a habitat that deserves to be protected for future generations.

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NEWS AROUND TOWN

By: Michael P . Seguin

Town hires a new CAO

On June 27th, 2011, Council adopted a by-law to appoint a new Chief Administrative Officer, Mr. Troy Speck. Mr. Speck has experience leading in both small and large municipalities, namely as Chief Administrative Officer for the City of Elliot Lake and General Manager of the Corporate Services Department for the City of Kitchener. He also was elected and served two terms as a councilor in Elliot Lake. Mr. Speck's educational background includes both a Bachelor of Arts degree (B.A.) and a Law degree (LLB) from the University of Western Ontario and is currently working to complete his Masters degree in Public Administration.

We want to welcome Mr. Speck and look forward to his fresh new thoughts and ideas in providing a strong and transparent administration that will promote and advance the policies that will best serve our community. We also want to thank Reg Russwurm, who admirably served as interim CAO for about 8 months

Source: *Town News Blast 06/28/2011*

Toronto-based brewer buys Thornbury cidery

The Beer Barons, a craft beer importer from Europe, purchased the Thornbury Village Cidery in July, 2011 and has now replaced the "Peelers" label with the "Thornbury Premium Apple Cider" bottle. The new locally produced premium product and brand name have been tested across Canada, with the new modified cider recipe containing 5.3 % alcohol and champagne yeast for a dry and crisp liquid. The Toronto-based company plans to go global with this new product – which will certainly put the Thornbury community on the world beverage stage.

The brewers have also indicated that they plan to introduce "Thornbury Premium Cider" in a can at the LCBO stores this fall. They also want to develop a tourism experience that would allow for cidery tours, and an on-site store where the new cider and other product line extensions can be sold.

Source: *Simcoe.com 7/8/2011*

The new Town hall is now complete

As you may already know, the new Town hall was completed in May and is now occupied by the entire staff (54 at last estimate) – with Financial Services, Administration Services and Council Chambers on the main floor and Planning Services, and Recreation, Engineering and Public Works, and Building Services on the second floor.

This is certainly a quality building and has been designed and constructed to a LEED Gold Certification Level – one that projects leadership in energy and environmental design and is expected to be sustainable in the community for years to come.

However, two interesting developments:

1) in May, 2011, staff advised Council that the town hall construction was over budgeted by about \$250,000 (now in the \$8.7 million dollar range). This overage (now debt) will be funded by a low-interest 3.3 million loan to the town received from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities but to be paid back by the taxpayer. We also learned that the town hall budget does not include the costs associated with the purchase of the old Esso Station land, the purchase of the trail head parking lot and the design and construction of the trail head parking lot, costs amounting to almost \$300,000 and undoubtedly, more debt.

2) in June, 2011, Council approved an Interim Guide for rental of town hall space primarily during working hours, at no cost (at least until a by-law is in place), to not-for profit groups, providing service to the residents and community of the Blue Mountains. After-hour use may be considered only under supervision by a Town employee and if such use is directly related to services/functions as part of the Town's core services.

Source: Simcoe.com 5/4/2011 and Staff report CEDC.11.14

County's Strategic Plan – make it a single-tier municipality?

Apparently, the Warden Arlene Wright, in considering a new County strategic Plan, visualizes the County's nine municipalities as too weak to survive on their own without more economic growth and less competition for the same services. Maybe this is in response to our Council questioning the Town's County contributions through taxation (25% of County budget): is the taxpayer in the Blue Mountains getting their fair and equal value for his dollar? I'm sure every other municipality is asking the same question.

What makes this story interesting is that the deputy mayor of the Blue Mountains, Duncan McKinlay, wants to be warden of Grey County next year. The "old boys club" has virtually guaranteed it. Will the deputy mayor follow in the "footsteps" of the existing warden and seek a "single-tier municipality"? Certainly he will be asked to confirm and implement any new roles and responsibilities of county council that come out of the new strategic plan – will they be more or less!! Can the deputy mayor divide his attention between two levels of bureaucracy and be fair to our municipality – maybe it's time for us to consider separation from the County.

Source: Sun Times 8/3/2011 & Enterprise Bulletin 8/2/2011

The BMRA-AGM keeps it's tradition

The AGM at the Village Conference Centre at Blue Mountain Resorts on May 28th, 2011 was considered a success and attracted 63 members and guests. The business portion of the meeting was followed by a traditional guest program which included MPP, Jim Wilson reporting on the Provincial Conservative Platform and the upcoming election, Deputy Mayor Duncan McKinlay reporting on the OP Review and recent decisions regarding the town's financial health/state and Dan Skelton from the Blue Mountain Resorts reporting on the economic

conditions as well as new and proposed changes at Blue.

Real Estate News – Six Month Summary, 2011

According to the Georgian Triangle Real Estate Board MLS statistics, there were 630 transactions in the first 6 months of 2011, slightly down from 649 in 2010. Interestingly, the volume of sales was up in the \$200,000-\$300,000 and the \$400,000-\$500,000 categories.

The average price for the first six months of 2011 was \$322,936 compared to \$317,873 in 2010, reflecting an overall increase of 1.6%. Despite this small increase, almost 68% of all active listings (1,973 year to date) expired without finding a buyer.

It will be interesting to see whether or not the sales volume will pick up over the remainder of the year and reach the 1,906 transactions in 2010. Also, the average price for all of 2010 was \$285,852 and a surge in volume is expected to bring the six month average down closer to \$300,000 or less.

The Blue Mountains saw a decline of 65 transactions in the first six months of 2011 compared to 78 transactions in 2010. The average price was \$546,461 in 2011 compared to \$484,023 in 2010. It is noted that certain number of sales over \$1,000,000 may have skewed the average price in 2011. Collingwood sold 162 units in the first six months of 2011 (20 more than 2010) with an average price at \$290,768 in 2011 compared to \$230,050 in 2010. Once again a surge in sales over the next 6 months is expected to reduce the average price closer to \$280,000.

Some new developments include: a high density development at the corner of Cranberry Trail East and Highway 26 has been serviced for seven townhouse blocks; the old Cranberry driving range is moving through the approval process to provide for town homes and assisted living units; Admiral Collingwood Place is before Council for approval of a 6 storey building with 110 residential units and 35,000 sq. ft. of commercial space; Tanglewood is finally moving ahead with a proposed 26 bungalow town house development; and the Shipyards is considering moving forward with more units, in addition to the already built and mostly sold 130 units.

Karen Poshtar provides a quarterly newsletter that generally deals with new developments and real estate trends in the Town's of Collingwood and the Blue Mountains and you are welcomed to visit her web site at www.collingwoodhomes.ca. to see more links or to share with her some of your interests in the real estate market.

Quick Hits!

- New developments in Thornbury include physical upgrades to The Mill Restaurant, the new Simplicity Bistro in the former Sterios location, and the Ruffled Grouse Bistro at the Beaver Motel.
- Royal LePage Canada released a Recreational Property Report in May, 2011 (Toronto Star) indicating that a standard waterfront land-access cottage in Ontario (1,000 sq. ft., 3 bedroom on a 100-foot lot) would cost between \$150,000 and \$750,000, with the Meaford/Thornbury area one of the most expensive in the \$600,000 range.
- Travellers along Highway 26, between Home Hardware and the Georgian Trail, on the east side of Thornbury, must abide by reduction in speed limit from 80 km/hr to 70 km/hr. This was necessary for the public safety of both Highway 26 (at County Rd. 2) and the Georgian Trail traffic.
- The Clendenan Bridge on the 10th Line in Clarksburg has been close for safety reasons. Studies are currently being undertaken by structural engineers to determine whether or not the bridge can be effectively repaired in a costly and timely manner.

- The inaugural Blue Mountains Chili and Ribfest was held on Saturday July 9th, 2011 at the Horse Park on Clark Street. While a good time was had by all those that attended, the final numbers have not been released and the success of the event is still unknown.
- Remember to vote on October 6th, 2011 – your vote counts and the state of Provincial depends on you!

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NEW HEALTH CLINIC OPEN



The Blue Mountains Community Health Centre in Thornbury is now open for business!!!! Two local family doctors have started seeing patients in the new building and two new family doctors are expected by the end of 2011. The Thornbury Physiotherapy Clinic is expected to move in by January, 2012.

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BMRA BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

BMRA Board of Directors

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Vice President	Lester Posen	lbposen@rogers.com
Secretary	Catherine Sholtz-Seguin	mpseguin@rogers.com
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