



Town of The Blue Mountains Election - 2018 Candidate Questionnaire

Blue Mountain Village Association (BMVA) is a not-for-profit, member-based association and regional destination management organization (DMO). Our membership consists of more than 1300 lodging (hotel Condominium) unit owners, commercial businesses, homeowner residents and resort operators. Our homeowner membership class alone represents more than 2000 household votes in the upcoming municipal election. Collectively, we drive more than 2.5 million visitors to the region, employ between 2700 and 3300 employees throughout the year, contribute to the local tax base and support the economic growth of regional businesses from Main Street operators to specialized local service providers.

In addition to domestic and international marketing, year-round festivals and 24-hour operations management, BMVA is a proactive advocate for members to governments at all levels. BMVA ensures our members' best interests have a voice and their needs are met. With the upcoming municipal election, BMVA's membership is concerned about a number of pressing issues and the leadership required to shape our community and economy over the next four years. We want to learn more about how you, as an elected representative, will respond to the issues identified below. Your responses will be shared with BMVA members so that they have information that will allow them to make an informed choice on Election Day.

Thank you for your time and interest, we look forward to this important first exchange.

Supporting Tourism Industry & Role of Blue Mountain Village Association

Supporting Tourism Industry & Employees

Blue Mountain Resort recently celebrated its 75th anniversary, a tribute to the vision of its founder and local icon Jozo Weider. In addition to this history, many do not know that planning for today's Blue Mountain Village dates back to the 1972 Official Plan and successive land use planning exercises into the early 1980s and beyond, led by local planners, municipalities and community members. Tourism is one of the main economic drivers and a significant employer in the area today - *by design!* Proactive planning almost 50 years ago ensured that our economy would grow leveraging our natural assets; it also ensured that we would rebound from the last decline in manufacturing. Today, approximately 2.5 million visitors come to the area annually, providing thousands of jobs in all tourism fields and spurring growth and employment in many secondary sectors. Growth has largely been linked to the success of world class attractions and the supporting infrastructure for visitors such as accommodations, restaurants, agri-tourism and retail. As our community's "lifestyle value proposition" has strengthened, these benefits have also attracted interest among new residents and the development sector which has driven housing, population and tax-base growth for regional municipalities.

- a) *What initiatives would you support to grow, improve and protect the tourism economy & to help communicate our history and planning, economic impact, and the benefits & value we bring to residents' lifestyles, property values, etc.?*
- b) *How would you organize & finance such initiatives?*

The original vision was that Blue Mountain would develop into a true 4 season resort. With the creation of the Blue Mountain village and the related attractions this vision has now become a reality. There is no other place in North America which has access to so many millions of potential visitors within a 2-3 hour drive. The tourism economy benefits all residents in the community by providing good jobs in both tourism (Blue Mountain Resorts) and the related service businesses that serve the tourists (restaurants, spas, wineries, main street shops & boutiques, rental shops, golf courses, tour companies and the list goes on and on) The tourism economy also gives residents the opportunity to open new businesses to serve the visitors. The opportunities are endless for our residents because of tourism. The desirability of our area has also driven real estate prices up, benefiting long time residents that have invested in the area.

In order to protect the tourism economy and balance the resident's concerns about tourism I will fully support the new official plan and zoning bylaw review that has put policies in place that support the continued growth of tourism in and around the base of the ski hills. Our planning documents tell us where tourism growth should occur and where residential areas should remain residential.

Future growth in our tourism economy will be paid for by developers, as Mayor I will work to ensure that we cut the red tape and unnecessary bureaucracy. I will make sure our planning and engineering departments are sufficiently staffed to provide reasonable response times to development projects. Our town will support business and the jobs that it creates. In order for residents to understand the positive economic impacts of tourism I believe the operators and organizations like the BMVA need to do a better job educating the residents on the benefits that a four season tourism economy brings to everyone that lives here.

Blue Mountain Village Association Effectiveness

BMVA's **Vision** is to be the first-choice, year-round destination for those seeking personalized and authentic experiences that create lasting memories. Our **Mission** is to be an innovative destination management organization (DMO) which enhances and promotes the greater Blue Mountain experience to the benefit of Village stakeholders. We are internationally recognized and highly effective, growing Blue Mountain Village (and surrounding destinations) into one of the top four destinations in Ontario! Our leadership position and work locally drives our economy and provides benefits to the municipality in that BMVA takes the lead (and the costs) to execute international/national tourism marketing, annual festival programming and regional economic development efforts. As such, taxpayer dollars and municipal staff time are saved compared to similar tourism destinations that rely on the municipality to do this work. BMVA and the Town work together in partnership to support the entire municipality and we aim to strengthen these ties and efforts with the new Council in the future.

- a) *Do you believe that BMVA is effective in its Vision and Mission and that we add value to residents, businesses and government?*
- b) *Will you support continued partnership between BMVA and the Town?*

The BMVA is key to growing our economy and making sure visitors enjoy their experience. The association understands what visitors want and is uniquely positioned to market our area. This function is not something that the town should try to do, especially when we have such a capable organization already in place. I will support the partnership with the BMVA and work to make it stronger.

Leadership, Strategy & Economic Development

Leadership

The Town of The Blue Mountains business community is very concerned about single-issue politics that detract from Council's focus on big-picture planning and the leadership required to effectively serve our dynamic municipality. BMVA members are looking for candidates who drive community-wide leadership that considers the needs and aspirations of permanent and part-time residents, key business sectors, employees, entrepreneurs, municipal partners, visitors and more! Further, we are looking for solutions-based, service-oriented and collaborative mindsets.

- a) *Please share what your leadership approach will be and how you will ensure that all community voices – including the business community – will be incorporated into your work.*
- b) *Please share your thoughts on how the Town of The Blue Mountains can improve its approach to solutions, service and collaboration.*

I feel that council needs positive leadership. Council must not pursue agendas that are unattainable or create divisive and negative feelings. Nor may council cater to special interest groups at the exclusion of the entire community. I feel that we need to get back to the basics of running the town for the benefit of our whole community.

We have a town office that is staffed with competent and knowledgeable professionals whose job is to advise council and make recommendations to council based on their professional training. We need to better use this resource in making decisions.

I am an approachable person who has played an active role in the community through business, volunteer firefighting, service clubs, etc. I am always available to listen to member of our community. The business community is represented through the BIA, BMCC, BMVA and I intend to work with these organizations to improve the business environment in our community.

Economic Development Strategy for Future

It is important for our next Council to proactively plan for future growth to support existing sectors as well as to explore economic diversification; key ingredients to weathering economic downturns as well as the forces of market disruption. A well-developed economic strategy must be created to serve as a roadmap for our community's growth. Further, this strategy must be supported by our new Council so that recommendations can turn into action through leadership vs. plans that tend to "stay on the shelf".

- a) *What initiatives would you propose to ensure Town of The Blue Mountains has a robust and diverse economic strategy for short and long term growth?*
- b) *How would you organize & finance such initiatives?*

I believe that our official plan has laid out the road map for our community's future growth. I will fully support the growth of tourism and non tourism businesses. Growing businesses will support an abundance of good jobs in the area and allow everyone to participate in our strong local economy. I further believe that because we are now a true four season destination this will protect us from harsh downturns that have hurt us in the past . Supporting business friendly policies will allow us to grow and create jobs for our residents. I might also suggest working to support a business-friendly environment in the Town, to support the growth of existing businesses and attract new businesses, the growth of which will serve to grow the commercial tax base. I might suggest working with the County's economic development group to identify opportunities, and/or what the Town needs to put

in place, to attract new commercial and/or industrial interests that are appropriate for the Town and its environment. When referencing "industrial" I want to make it clear that I'm not talking about a type of heavy industry that would be incompatible with the Town, but light and/or clean industries. I might also want to suggest working with educational institutions to explore opportunities for TBM to become a centre for research related to things that are already located in the Town (ex. Agriculture; Tourism; etc.) I've always wondered whether there might be potential to partner with, for example, Guelph University to locate an agricultural research field station in TBM, which would bring students, professors, administrators, and develop research that supports the Town's already strong agricultural sector.

Labour Market Issues

Labour Shortage

South Georgian Bay is facing critical labour shortages that threaten the economic stability of the region. Unemployment in the region is forecast at 3% versus 7.2% province-wide. Region wide, we estimated 800 unfilled tourism positions as winter 2018 approached. Servicing visitors is becoming very difficult as visitation to the area continues to grow year-round. Furthermore, there is a very small pool of new local employees entering the labour force resulting in a need to attract new hires from outside the area. Further job vacancies exist in health care, manufacturing, transportation and other key sectors.

- a) *What initiatives would you support to attract and retain workers to the area?*
- b) *How would you organize & finance such initiatives?*

In order to attract and retain workers to the area we have to fully support the creation of affordable housing. I have seen the proposals to make housing more affordable by having the municipality possibly donate land and or reduce / eliminate development charges. These are all possibilities that I will be open to. We are a resort town and I believe we do not need to recreate the wheel, I think we need to study the model Whistler used to create staff housing and put a plan in place that allows us to do the same thing here. It is almost impossible for developers to build affordable housing because it is just so expensive to develop property with all of the related fees, expenses, studies, etc. that have to be incurred before you put a shovel in the ground. I believe that the town should explore the idea of identifying parcels of land suitable for affordable housing and then have the town take these lands through the development process. When the land is shovel ready we would then work with developers to build the actual housing. I believe that it would be much more cost effective for the town to secure development approvals on land deemed to be suitable for affordable housing. This should help to significantly reduce the cost of getting affordable housing units onto the market.

Housing Issues

Attainable Housing

One of the key challenges for attracting and retaining workers is a lack of attainable housing. The average price for a single-family home in South Georgian Bay has rapidly increased by 52% since 2011, thus depleting the stock of available residences for both permanent and seasonal workers. While high-value property construction continues to grow in Town of The Blue Mountains, rentals and middle-income dwellings for young people and families are virtually non-existent. Further complicating this issue is a “Not in My Backyard” attitude from some community members that opposes necessary density requirements to build attainable rental units for workers, entry-level condominiums and townhomes, starter homes for families, etc.

- a) *What specific initiatives would you support to increase the supply of attainable housing in Town of The Blue Mountains & area?*
- b) *How would you organize & finance such initiatives?*

See above answer

Short-term Accommodation (STA) rentals are an important economic driver in the community. Proposed changes that limit occupancy levels may have significant economic impacts on STA operators and for local businesses that depend on visitor spending. Proposed changes do not align with data which demonstrates that STA operators have achieved continuous improvements in noise, garbage and impact measures since the STA regulation has come into play.

- a) *What initiatives would you support to protect occupancy levels of existing operators of STAs?*
- b) *What initiatives will you champion in relation to the STA program in the future?*

The STA policies currently in place have been very effective in addressing the historic incompatibility of short term rentals and full time residents. Basically, the current policies have identified where STA's can be developed in the future and where they can not. The STA bylaw currently has policies in place that will not allow STA units to be developed in residential areas. The existing rules and regulations are very effective based on bylaw statistics and I do not support a reduction of the current occupancy limits. The current limits have met the test of life safety, property standards and health safety. Has anyone considered the legal implications and costs associated with a reduction in occupancy limits ? Has anyone considered the costs to our tourism industry that a reduction in the occupancy limit will have ? Until we have answers to these questions we should not make any changes to the existing limits.

Town Services & Municipal Taxes

Town services such as winter maintenance, waste management, fire and safety are funded through the municipal tax base. These are made up of a levy to property owners, development charges, and other taxes. Last year the tax levy imposed by the town was approximately two percent. The Town's budget is approximately \$15 million for 2018.

- a) *What Town services would you increase or decrease?*
- b) *Would you favour increasing or decreasing the tax rate of residents and businesses?*

I believe the level of services that the town is currently providing is adequate and council should work hard to not increase taxes going forward. Our municipality is growing quickly and our tax base is increasing with this growth. Our larger tax base should cover the increased services that come with growth. The overall debt of the Town of the Blue Mountains is comparatively small compared to

other municipalities and the overall financial health of the Town is favorable and should allow us to maintain our current tax rates. However, relying on growth alone is a short term view, as growth has limitations (ie: a municipality has size and available land limitations and can not grow forever). Also, I believe a number of studies have shown that, even with growth, over the long term a residential tax base alone is insufficient to provide the funds needed to adequately cover the costs of supporting municipal operations and infrastructure. A solid component of ongoing commercial and industrial taxes is also necessary. I wouldn't promise 0% tax increases, but perhaps reasonable and measured tax increases as needed, in line with inflationary pressures that are beyond the control of the town.

Transportation Issues

Public Transit

South Georgian Bay has a limited public transit infrastructure, limiting access to jobs for workers who live in less expensive but further away locations. An important six-month test pilot of a full day scheduled bus service between Town of The Blue Mountains, Collingwood and Wasaga Beach began on July 1st, 2018. This regional bus service will allow for more visitors to take advantage of the area's recreational offerings as well as offer a transportation option for residents and workers in the area.

- a) *What initiatives would you support to increase transportation options for visitors, residents and workers in the area?*
- b) *How would you organize & finance such initiatives?*

The pilot project has been a success and should be increased to include Owen Sound. The schedule should be improved to better accommodate work schedules. The costs should be shared between the municipalities and a nominal amount from the riders.

Active Transportation/Cycling

Improving green transportation improves our environment, traffic congestion and our health. A shovel-ready plan has been developed to build a safe and direct cycling route between Collingwood and Blue Mountain Village (to support local residents and employees); now that the plan has been created, it requires leadership to take the next steps to build it.

- a) *Do you support increased cycling options for the region, including the Collingwood/Village cycling route?*
- b) *How would you organize & finance such initiatives?*

Cycling has become a popular past time with both our resident population and tourists. Where the County has added paved service shoulders the benefit to both motorists and cyclists has been enormous. I do support increased cycling options for the region including the Collingwood/Village cycling route. I support adding paved service shoulders wherever possible. It would encourage the road departments, both municipal and county, to include paved service shoulders in their budgets when our roads are being upgraded.

Road Safety

The condition and safety of our roadways (County and Municipal) are critically important to residents, businesses and visitors. Our members feel that improvements need to be made such as, clearly marking

pedestrian crossings, repairing potholes in high-traffic zones, improved maintenance and addition of more street lights, more bike lanes, more paved shoulders on busy roads, etc.

- a) *What road safety improvements would you prioritize and why?*
- b) *How would you organize & finance such initiatives?*

I agree with all of the above areas of improvement but I would focus on bike lanes and paved shoulders. I believe this is the most potentially dangerous situation the user of the road network in our community.

As our town grows and our tax base increases some of these funds need to be directed to solving these issues.