

BMVA response Re: 2018 Candidate Questionnaire

From

Andrew Siegwar

24/07/18

Thank you for the questions regarding support for tourism and recreation in the Town of The Blue Mountains. The overall subject matter is quite extensive. It took some time to research some of the background on the historical nature of the topic, the record of previous government inputs, the role of the former Georgian Triangle Economic Development Corporation and the potentials now being created as a result of the significant development approvals in “Blue”, Collingwood, Stayner and Wasaga Beach. The South Georgian Bay area has become a significant tourism, recreation and residential destination area, which is creating a need for responses to address the various impacts of the potential increased population and development levels.

Supporting Tourism

Tourism has been a force in the Town as well as surrounding areas for over a century. The late 18th century saw the rise of Wasaga Beach as a resort destination. With that came summer cottage and resort development along the shores of Nottawasaga Bay taking advantage of the summer season on the water. Sport fishing came with the cottaging extending Tourism into the spring and fall. Then, Jozo Wieder saw the potential of Blue Mountain as a winter destination that has now evolved into our four season tourism and recreational destination serving the 2.5 million visitors a year. Previous studies by the GTEDC using Statistics Canada background indicates that up to 90% of the regional labour force is, in some way associated with providing service or tourism functions to our residents and visitors. It is imperative that each of the local municipal governments in the Georgian Triangle continue to recognize this economic force and provide policies that can ensure its continuation.

A good start in “Blue” would be to determine how the existing municipal policy framework recognizes the importance of tourism and, where necessary upgrade those policies to better reflect the economic reality that now exists and ensure that it can continue to expand.

Leadership, Strategy & Economic Development

Leadership – My education and experiences have indicated that public and agency inputs are a significant benefit to the decision making process. The Ontario Planning Act makes public consultation mandatory for any planning file and although the levels of consultation are minimal, the Act also allows municipalities to expand the public process as long as the processes are contained in the Official Plan. Public processes add costs to an application process, but increase process can also enable better and

more amenable decision making, avoiding appeal actions. I would like to review our processes to see where additional public and agency inputs may be of valuable.

I would also like to make attendance at Council and particularly at all committee meetings more inviting for the general public by providing suitable space and seating. It may not be used but the option must be made available. Through the open door option there is potential to initiate public discussion at the initial stages of consideration rather than later when much of the initial scoping and financial outlays are complete. We may even achieve better communications between Council, staff and the public in this manner.

Strategy for Future – Diversification is a goal for every municipal economic development strategy. In the case of ToTBM it must be undertaken in the context of the opportunities provided by our physical circumstances. Although tourism is a major function of our economy in the area it is not the only function. The communities of Blue as well as our neighbour, Meaford have long been recognized for the geography and environmental characteristics conducive to the production of apples and more recently, grapes. The local fruit industry is evolving and we must be open to further enabling that evolution.

I believe that we can leverage the expansion of both our tourism/recreation and agricultural economies into areas not yet undertaken. Recent changes in agricultural production has seen new approaches to pesticide application that has the potential to create diversification on the equipment side of apple production. Emergence as a preferred cycling destination, notwithstanding recent legal issues, may provide impetus for another more significant recreational use of our geography related to product design and testing, safety options or highway construction and design, recognizing that cycling is really just starting in North America.

With expansion of our electronic communications potential in the area along with proximity to the Toronto business region and improvements to the access road network, we can become a recreation business centre.

Labour Market and Housing

Our difficulties in relation to labour supply and affordable or attainable housing are not unique. Many other areas across the Province, the Country and North America are seeing similar difficulties. A review of available literature on from other jurisdictions does not appear to provide ready solutions to our problem. Each area indicated that the ability to attract suitable labour appears to be dependent upon the availability of appropriately costed housing as well as the availability of suitable transportation to work options. In my opinion, it is the housing issue that must be addressed in the first instance, but with the development industry focussed on our current high end market, the options to provide lower cost accommodation is minimized unless both financial and time frame incentives can be provided. Municipal governments, working within the confines of legislation have limited opportunity to impact

the problem and the Provincial and Federal government levels appear reluctant to provide suitable funding to rectify the situation.

Apartments in houses, as permitted under the Planning Act as well as permissions for rooming and boarding houses in suitable circumstances can be considered as partial solutions to the affordable housing gap as long as access to the workplace is available. These ideas primarily rely on the private sector to initiate these options within the limitations of the building code. While the apartment option is protected from appeal by the Planning act, the rooming house option would require zoning approval and could be subject to appeal.

STA

The STA concept has been around since the concept of the cottage rental became a land use fact. It is my opinion that the validity and need for the concept continues as a valid occupancy method but that there needs to be better methods of impact control to reduce and potentially eliminate the negative results of the party atmosphere that is associated with some of the STA's. I would like to further review the municipal options under existing legislation to determine the availability of deterrents or penalties to the unwanted impacts of STA's in an effort to ensure their compatibility in the areas in which they are located.

Services and Taxes

The rationale for taxation is to provide the services mandated by legislation or requested and demanded by the residents in order to ensure their health, safety and convenience. Without a thorough knowledge of all of the services and the levels of provision, it is not appropriate to make any determination of increase or decrease. As an example, in 2005 the City of Brantford undertook a full in house service review, identifying 189 discrete services provided by the city. Only after identification did they proceed to evaluate the level of need for a service, bringing the matter to the attention of the public for a full discussion. I believe that ToTBM would greatly benefit from such a study, not just in terms of evaluating any cost and tax issues, but also in informing Council, staff and the public about the services, levels, costs, and legislative and insurance implications of each, and only then identifying changes or deletions.

Transportation

Public Transit – Public transit is a necessity in almost all urban communities. ToTBM along with the Town of Collingwood, with all of the new development in process would appear to have or is on the verge of having the volume and density of housing to offer suitable ridership support for a transit system. As such, I congratulate the decision to embark on the 6 month transit experiment. The increase in population that the development applications in Collingwood, 'Blue' and Wasaga Beach should create further impetus to maintain and expand the service as new areas of homes become occupied. I would suggest, based on the potential for over 3000 new homes in Stayner, that the discussions be initiated to involve the Township of Clearview at the appropriate time, as an additional transportation and housing partner in the South Georgian Bay Region.

Cycling & Safety - I support all cycling in the region however note recent differences in attitudes of residents and some visiting cyclists. It is imperative that, if cycling is to become a significant part of our tourist economy that all parties involved concede that road safety should be our first requirement. We need active education of safety rules as well as understanding of the intent of legislation which states that ``slow moving traffic must move to the right`` is obeyed.

In deference to safety, it would be beneficial, at times of road construction that bicycle use and safety becomes a documented factor in design.

Thank you for the opportunity

Jim Uram, Candidate for Council

Town of The Blue Mountains