



## 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.?*

I would support initiatives which fulfill sustainable tourism:

Sustainable Tourism is defined as: *"Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities."* (UNWTO, 2016)

Tourism as a sustainable development model is a compelling one. Tourism is highly labor intensive, facilitates the development of new infrastructure, promotes conservation and revitalizes areas. Despite these benefits, tourism can be viewed for those who can afford it, rather than a nimble development tool. Initiatives of a sustainable nature are of particular importance as outdoor recreational tourism such as skiing (downhill, cross country) have a strong reliance on specific climatic conditions. The winter related sports such as the ski industry is regarded as the tourism market most directly and immediately affected by climate change. While Blue Mountain Village has thoughtfully evolved in a four season with something for all ages and abilities, climate change needs to always be factored into sustainable development.

I feel that the BVMA and the Town should give consideration to the sustainable model particularly as nature-based tourism is in increasingly high demand. To this end the 'blue economy' (water) is one which has yet to be more fully explored, particularly with the untapped potential of the Nottawasaga Island Lighthouse, while in Collingwood there are significant numbers of TOWN residents interested in the potential. There are also the shipwrecks which are of interest to snorkelers and divers.

I am aware that the Town has developed a vision for the Harbour area which is welcomed as our shoreline still remains rather undeveloped. There are also scenic, cultural and artistic events within the Town which could be accessed by those staying in the Blue Mountain Village, such as an Antique Fair at the Town's community center.

While not all of the above may not be within the parameters of the Blue Mountain Village per say, they provide for a more diverse portfolio of adventures for people staying and returning there to experience.

To help communicate our history and planning, economic impact, and the benefits & value the BVMA brings to residents' lifestyles, property values, I suggest consideration be given to the following:

Promote yourself locally, have seasonal local appreciation days, sponsor events, speak to the revenue to local businesses. I would stay away from the property values as given the shortage of affordable housing, I feel that drawing attention to this would not serve you well.

### *b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?*

I would propose the BMVA work with the Town with the development of an annual business plan. As for financing I would engage local businesses within the BMVA and or explore the feasibility of corporate sponsorship.

### 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?*

The BMVA is effective in its Vision and Mission to their residents, business, however, falls short with respect to the government which I assume is local and the surrounding community at large. It is unclear why the gaps are there, however, if successful this is one of the stakeholder relationships which I feel that need to be improved.

The BMVA has the potential to be more effective in adding value to residents and business in and outside of their membership. The 'lifestyle value proposition' extends beyond the boundaries of the BMVA and feel that there is unrealized value add propositions by the BMVA.

*b) Will you support continued partnership between BMVA and the Town?*

Definitely, however, would be supportive of an enhanced partnership between the BMVA, the Town, inclusive of the community. It is important for all stakeholders to acknowledge that there are tradeoffs involved. Like other economic activities, tourism both gives and takes from communities and travelers. When properly planned and managed, sustainable tourism can contribute to improved livelihoods, inclusion, cultural heritage and natural resource protection. What the BMVA, Town and the community needs to avoid is poorly planned tourism as it has the potential to negatively impact Towns, parks, and historic monuments, and put severe pressure on local infrastructure, resident communities, and their resources.

This 40 year old quote stands true today:

*For a tourism-based economy to sustain itself in local communities, the residents must be willing partners in the process. Their attitudes toward tourism and perceptions of its impact on community life must be continually assessed. (Allen et al. 1988)*

## 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.*

My leadership style starts with one of 'inclusivity'. I value the importance treating people and groups fairly. Personalizing individuals—that is, understanding and valuing the uniqueness of diverse others while also accepting them as members of the group. Lastly, leveraging the thinking of diverse groups for

smarter ideation and decision making. This though is not at the expense of having to make the tough decisions as when necessary. Throughout my career I have demonstrated managerial courage and accountability through measurement and transparent data. My boss says I am both a visionary and the organizational conscious given I am always aware of the bigger picture and the need to be mindful of the unintended consequences.

Other characteristics which are strengths of mine include: humility and accountability.

*b) Please share your thoughts on how the Town of The Blue Mountains can improve its approach to solutions, service and collaboration.*

The Town can elect a strong inclusive leader like myself who has a demonstrable and progressive track record of being a catalyst for creating and delivering innovative solutions which have clear measurable outcomes. Relationships are strained with a range of stakeholders. Highlighted recently, on the front-page Toronto Star article which has pitted cyclists against residents. While both sides have an opinion, the article in my opinion and a number of others has likely only reinforced personal beliefs as opposed to highlighting that there is concern on both parts which need to be addressed. I truly feel that the relationships with the stakeholders of which you are one are the foundation upon which Town can begin to reset its approach to solutions, service and collaboration. The stakeholders may range from Queens Park, County, the property developer, the local entrepreneur, the resident or weekender on the corner all of which feel that they are the most important. Developing relationships result in increased trust. Where there is trust, stakeholders work together more easily and effectively. Investing effort in identifying and building stakeholder relationships can increase confidence, minimize uncertainty, accelerate creative solutioning, decision-making and delivery.

I recognize the value of communicating with stakeholders and consulting with them early and often to build and sustain trust.

### 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?*

The timing of the development of an Economic Development Strategy in 2020 as outlined in the June 4, 2018 staff report to the Committee of the Whole aligns well with the election of a new Council with fresh ideas. As you have mentioned in your editorial posted on Sunday, February 4, 2018, the Town must leverage leadership to following through on recommendations. The Task Force of regional leaders from municipalities, counties, not-for-profit businesses, educators, and tourism operators cited outlines the key 5-points needed to address these challenges. I would only add that there needs to be more demonstrable action than 'encourage and advocate' – I would prefer to see 'actively seek'.

We hear a lot about the economic challenges facing small towns and rural areas such as ours. We need to flip the coin and build on our inherent strengths of our communities which we have not fully realized. One of our strengths to complete on is on quality of life; what's going on in that community, why do

people want to move here and live here. A decade ago the concept of “economic development based on quality of life and creative amenities” would have been laughable; today are doing it.

Actively promote that the Town is open for business. We have to look for the new jobs of the future, and rural communities have big strengths and opportunities to be centers of growth. There are businesses within the GTA and Southern Ontario who are having problems with recruitment and retention of creative young people as they look for affordable housing, childcare and unique communities away from expensive, competitive big cities.

The Town can with the support of organizations such as yours and the community at large to set goals and set out to achieve them.

*b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?*

- Bring the stakeholders together and build on the work to date
- Public private partnerships which likely need to also engage surrounding municipalities, such as Meaford and Collingwood
- Government funding opportunities

## 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?*

Providing the infrastructure of affordable housing, childcare and transit are key foundational pieces which need to be in place to support attracting and retaining workers to the area.

Affordable housing within the Town is critical as the neighbouring Town of Medford which used to provide some relief to Town tight housing market, are now experiencing their own housing affordability challenges that further exacerbate the housing options available to TGMs labour force.

*b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?*

Exploring the Federal Government's new National Housing Strategy for untapped opportunities

## 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.

Promote programs such as recently featured in The Spectator and more recently the Toronto Star, where by vetted younger people are paired with seniors for mutually gain. The Senior has increased monthly revenue, however, more importantly, someone is there for them as many seniors can go for days without contact. There is an absence of health care and LHIN Home and Community Care, especially as the Town while in one directly borders another.

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

Waterfront communities face the additional challenge of providing housing for permanent and seasonal residents and workers. Seasonal influxes of visitors and demand for second homes can overwhelm the existing housing supply in resort Towns or vacation destinations, driving prices up and adding to the cost premium already associated with land near water. The result is that housing is unaffordable for much of the workforce, such as police officers, teachers, and retail employees, that communities need to grow and thrive.

Affordable housing is not unique to The Town of Blue Mountains, however, is compounded by the ease of access from the GTA and Western Ontario to access the four season recreational activities.

- 20-30% (example as opposed to a firm number) of developments must include affordable housing solutions
- Zoning to support second (2<sup>nd</sup>) suites for rentals of greater than 30 days to accommodate seasonal workers
- The Town needs to establish a goal for housing resident workers. Without an established goal there is not against which progress can be measured.

*b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?*

Accessing both Federal and provincial funding streams to support the development of affordable housing; i.e. for that proposes a portfolio of diverse housing stock as opposed to concentrated at a price band. Shift the responsibility and risk to the private sector (developers) away from the Town and residents.

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?*

I would suggest that the BMVA give consideration to proactively publishing good news stories. Proactively advertise the data which demonstrates that STA operators have achieved continuous improvement. Often the opposers are not fully informed. I would also suggest the inclusion of a

resident on the Licensing Committee.

*b) What initiatives will you champion in relation to the STA program in the future?*

### 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?*

Increase:

- Road safety for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Transit

Decrease:

- Use of consultants and legal
- Services which are underused or not wanted by the residents while considering those of low volume, yet high yield in value.

*b) Would you favour increasing or decreasing the tax rate of residents and businesses?*

Decreasing the tax rate of residents and businesses. It has actually puzzled me for many years, '*where does the TOWNS spend its dollars as it has an extremely large tax base dollars?*' I also know I am not the only resident that asks that question. A significant portion of residents do not reside in the TOWNS full time and therefore do not draw on Town services to the extent that they would if there were full time. Condominiums do not draw on the services such as winter, waste water pipe repair to the same extend as they themselves are financially responsible.

While I understand that councillors are presented with the operating budget I can assure you that I will look at the detail and drill down with precision.

### 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 1<sup>st</sup>, 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?*

Engage the surrounding municipalities and the private sector to create viable options. I would also work with the large employers to align working hours to maximize uptake of the services. It is the volumes that are needed in addition to build the business case in addition to potential subsidies.

### *b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?*

Bring the stakeholders together and build on existing work with very much an action oriented lense.

- Private/public partnerships by means of request for proposal (RFP) process.
- Government funding

### 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.

### *Do you support increased cycling options for the region, including the Collingwood/Village cycling route?*

Yes

### *a) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?*

Private/public partnerships, such that when developers are planning their residential proposals the provision of cycling routes should be part of the development infrastructure as opposed to sole reliance on roads. The public contribution is making proposals of this kind mandatory and enabling ease of execution to link up with existing ones. An example of this would be connecting a development such as Windfall into a Collingwood/Village cycling route.

As for a cycling option for the Collingwood/Village, I would engage Collingwood as a stakeholder as with any additional tourist activity there would be a financial benefit to them

### 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?*

There needs to be defined bike paths for cyclists. Priority would be made on high volume routes, especially where there are identifiable destinations.

### *How would you organize & finance such initiatives?*

Work with the surrounding municipalities, county and cycling groups to provide input. For new and road upgrades, lobby and advocate that the RFP includes for the provision of a dedicated bike lane particularly at the County and Queens Park levels.

Any and all government funding should be accessed.



