



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.?*

In 2009/2010 I led the town's economic development planning project which produced a document called Red Hot and Blue: Economic Prosperity for The Blue Mountains. After many hours of

consultation with local and regional stakeholders, we identified several ideas that would help improve our overall economic sustainability as well as the various individual sectors. We described this as “Positioning The Blue Mountains as a Leading Rural Economy”. The first goal in that approach was to “Expand and strengthen a sustainable four-season tourism destination”. The plan went into more detail, but among the strategic objectives for tourism were:

- Promote and support tourism and ensure that The Blue Mountains is recognized as a four-season tourist destination.
- Be part of a tourism destination that distinguishes itself by its focus on sustainability, thereby creating a distinctive marketing advantage
- Market and brand collectively as the sustainable tourism destination of Ontario
- Become a sincerely friendly, service-oriented destination
- Promote the Great Lakes, escarpment, sports, Craigeleith Heritage Ridge and Riverwalk trail systems, culinary arts, agriculture and eco-tourism as major tourist attractions (augmenting BMR, BMVA, Scenic Caves, etc.)
- Provide accessible and affordable family recreation
- Ensure affordability of housing for seasonal and part-time workers (yes, that was already an issue eight years ago)

During my time with the Town, and with the full support of council and the CAO, I worked to bring closer ties between the town and the business community, including the BMVA. A great example of this was the town’s early support and sponsorship of the Centurion cycling event which we saw as a great way to promote Blue Mountain and the whole town as great place to pursue a growing tourism activity. We persuaded Grey County and our neighbouring towns and townships, to help. I’d like to see this kind of effort throughout the town.

b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?

I would encourage a program that brings together the various stakeholders such as BMVA, the farm community, Thornbury and Clarksburg business associations, the Chamber of Commerce and others to develop strategies and work on promoting the entire town to the benefit of all. I don’t think we need massive amounts of money, we just need to work together to use what we have more effectively.

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?

I think BMVA’s success speaks for itself and I value the work BMVA does for the whole community. Indeed, in *Red Hot and Blue*, we decided that the Resort is best-positioned to lead in marketing and promotion effort. But we all know there are weaknesses and I believe we can work together to, at least, improve our outcomes. The Apple Pie Trail, for example, helped create a tourism draw in the middle of a shoulder season. One area that really needs a full-town effort is the issue of attainable

housing. We need to build on what each group is already doing and get rid of the “Us vs. Them” mentality that exists in some quarters.

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

I have seen, first-hand, how a strong partnership can benefit everyone. The Resort and BMVA are our biggest tourism draws and pay a significant share of local and county taxes. It should be a “no-brainer” that we would work as partners and I would support this very strongly.

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.

I have led many collaborative projects and have found that there is just no better way to create long-lasting change and viable programs. I led the Marsh Street Centre through its early years, from a dream to a reality. I was part of the CAUSE Committee for downtown improvements. I served on the fundraising committee to preserve the Craighleith Depot (for me it was a promise to Kenn and Suyrea Knapman) and I have been involved in various other community groups. In some cases, I was a leader, in others I was a follower, but in all of them I worked as part of a group. No one ever achieves these good works on their own. It takes the efforts, energy, knowledge and skills of many people to bring these projects to completion and to keep them alive for the long run. I would like to see the town create more advisory groups such as the existing agriculture advisory committee, to bring more interested parties into the conversation.

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

I don’t think this is a complicated matter. Just ask. I hate to sound repetitive, but when we worked on *Red Hot and Blue* we invited the general community, of course, but we also identified specific groups and individuals and ensured they were directly invited and encouraged to join the effort. As a result, we were able to have the ideas and views of many local business leaders as well as lots of retired professionals – some of them very well-known beyond the local community – as part of our work. Indeed, some of them became very engaged. All we did was ask the questions and provide good coffee and soft drinks. Oh, yes, and when we asked them questions and we shut up and let them answer.

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?*

Obviously, we need to be serious and strident about strengthening and protecting our agricultural and tourism sectors. But I think we need to go beyond that. There are other opportunities and we can and should position ourselves as welcoming to a whole array of economic development possibilities. As examples, I have discussed the potential to work with universities and colleges to develop satellite campuses. Some ideas that were raised in the Red Hot and Blue study were a school of geriatric medicine and/or a school of archaeology, both of which would be a great fit to our community. We know that when there are post-secondary schools in a community, some of the graduates will opt to continue working in that community, thus we can retain some young professionals and entrepreneurs. We can also encourage new businesses and institutions that tend to help build or rebuild communities. When we started the Marsh Street Centre, downtown Clarksburg had several empty buildings. We hoped we could encourage a new artistic community to develop there and that is what happened. We can also work to attract small- and medium-sized companies moving into emerging technologies such as green energy. We have a lot to offer but we are not telling enough people about it. We also need to update Red Hot and Blue and put it into practice.

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

Again, this does not require huge expenditures. We do need an Economic Development person on staff and we need to give that person direction -- and a reasonable budget -- to look for these opportunities and engage individuals and groups who can help us bring some of these objectives to fruition. This person needs to be a great researcher and first-class salesperson as well as someone who can bring together the various leaders of our town and our economic region. Glitz and glamour won't succeed as well as good, old-fashioned hard work supported by a solid community consensus. We can update the Red Hot and Blue study in-house once an economic development staffer is in place.

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?*

Housing has surfaced as the key issue in attracting workers to the area. Worker housing at Blue Mountain Resort would help, but this issue is town-wide. I believe we need to work with the development industry to find ways to develop suitable multi-unit and single-family homes that are priced to suit first-time buyers and renters.

We need to look for developers who understand the opportunity available to them and we need to give them appropriate incentives – such as a reasonable increase in density – to build the types of housing we need. The demand exists; we just need developers to understand they have a ready-made market for the right kind of housing.

I think we also need to promote outside of the local area. However, any joint effort to attract more young workers here will always be constrained by the lack of housing.

Finally, I think we could partner with Muskoka and Haliburton to try to persuade the federal and provincial governments to offer incentives – such as a tax break for employers to allow them to increase their wages and/or benefits.

b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?

We have tremendous advantages that should attract lots of young workers. They just can't find a home here, so we need to address attainable housing. (See more about in my answer to the next question.) In the short term, we need to identify what we do have to offer and promote the town and region as place that has lots of jobs to offer. Once an Economic Development person is on board, they can work on engaging post-secondary institutions and others who might be interested in moving or opening here.

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?

As you mentioned, there is a long-standing opposition to multi-unit residential development in our town. We have also discouraged smaller detached homes on small lots. But these are the types of housing stock we need if we are going to have a sustainable economy that supports younger people and young families. It is possible to build attractive, well-landscaped small- and medium-sized apartment buildings that would increase the rental housing stock without creating the feel of big city suburbia. We need to start by changing our thinking. We need to be willing to allow some multi-unit and detached homes on smaller lots, provided they are priced within the range that is suitable for first-time buyers and renters. Transit is also part of the answer, but that alone won't solve the problem. If we want young workers here, we need to welcome them and make our community affordable to them.

b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?

It's obvious that cookie cutter solutions won't work for us. We need to get creative and find new options. If we all work together, we can do that. Incentives to builders to develop “starter” housing within existing communities is an option I'd like to explore. The days when governments can fund large housing projects are long gone. There are just too few units delivered in comparison to the amount of money invested. There will be costs, but, again, the real investment will be in the form of hard work through research, networking and bringing together knowledgeable people.

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?

It's unfortunate that the irresponsible STA owners have poisoned the well for the entire sector. Certainly, in the past, this issue reached a point at which the town had no choice but to act to protect the rights of its residents to enjoy their properties without the trouble created by groups renting from these irresponsible STA owners. That doesn't mean we should make it unduly expensive or difficult for responsible people to operate an STA business where appropriate. I don't pretend to have all the answers to this issue and I am keeping an open mind with the intent of reaching a solution that works.

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

The STA industry needs to win back the community. The public has heard too many horror stories about loud parties, trespassing, streets clogged with parked cars, unsafe conditions, and so on. It's clear there is still resistance in the general community -- a recent proposal to council was met with almost universal opposition from neighbours who fear these kinds of problems coming to their quiet residential street. The industry has a lot of work to do to assure the public that the existing regulations will prevent the problems of the past. Even though most STA owners are responsible people who try to avoid problems, it only takes one or two bad apples to spoil the bushel. As I said, I have an open mind but many people, especially in neighbourhoods that have been troubled in the past, will take a lot more convincing. The only way forward is to continue engaging all sides to reach a consensus by-law.

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?

The one I hear about a lot is snow ploughing. Residents want their roads cleared within a reasonable time after a snowfall, before the snow freezes into hard-packed, jagged ruts. Leaving several inches of snow and ice on residential streets poses a potential safety issue and can damage vehicles. On streets with no sidewalks there's a hazard to pedestrians, too. I know the roads department does what they can with their resources, and the plough operators work long, difficult hours and would like to be able to do the whole job. They'll do the job if they're given the tools. I'm not sure that failing to clear snow is really giving taxpayers value for their tax dollars. I think we can do better and I'd like council and staff to look for answers, which should probably include increasing our snow ploughing capabilities.

I'm also open to establishing a public transportation system. (See below).

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

To me, it's all about value. No one likes paying taxes, but we must pay for the services the municipality provides – everything from policing and fire protection to roads, waste management, animal control, planning, parks and recreation facilities and support for many important community service groups. Unlike the higher levels of government -- which get much more media attention -- the local municipality touches your life and the lives of your family and neighbours every day. I am content to pay my fair share of those costs. That said, there is a limit and it's crucial that the municipality spends every penny wisely and gets appropriate value for whatever we, as taxpayers, invest in local services.

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?

I think the real question is how can we provide a transportation service that does not put an unduly large burden on our budgets? Every time I see an empty or almost-empty bus, I can't help wonder whether the taxpayers are really getting value for their money. Since the people who use the system pay part of the costs, they are also losing out because part of their fare goes to fund those empty seats. Do we really need full-sized buses, or can we achieve our goal with vans? I support public transit, but I want to be sure we provide an effective service at a reasonable cost to users and taxpayers.

b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?

It might be best to look at a regional system, provided we can achieve some cost efficiencies. We also need to ensure we find the right size of service – one that meets our needs without wasting money, fuel and maintenance costs through unneeded trips. I realize we can see savings in other areas (for example, the costs to create and maintain parking lots) if the service operates efficiently, but these will be negated if we aren't careful to avoid waste.

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?

My understanding from a former county roads superintendent is that there are long-term cost savings if we widen the paved roadway by a couple of meters to provide for bicycle lanes. There is a significant reduction in cracking and break-up of the road edges because there is less auto traffic over those edges. Cycling has also become a valuable tourism activity and a preferred, even necessary, mode of transportation for many people. I would support a plan that calls for adding cycle

lanes on major roads where they can be safely accommodated. I know of at least once Ontario city, which I visit several times each year, where four-lane streets were reduced to two lanes with bike lanes on either side of the road. There was an outcry, at first, and predictions of chaos because of the reduction in the number of auto lanes, but that has not materialized. Traffic moves smoothly and there is very little congestion, at least no more than existed before the bike lanes were installed.

b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?

I would build it into the budget for road upgrades and improvements over time. In some places, there would be significant added costs to a roads project, but those costs would be recovered through longer life span and reduced maintenance costs for the road surfaces.

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?

All the items you mentioned in the question are important. The town's road budget needs to include sufficient funding to take care of these maintenance items as they arise. We have some streets and main roads that are getting worn out and fixing them will not get any cheaper if we keep putting it off. Another issue, for me, is sight triangles at intersections. There are some intersections where parked vehicles, trees and shrubs and other items block drivers' view of cross traffic. We need to work on cleaning these up. Also, as mentioned earlier, I'd like to ensure the roads crew have the resources to keep our streets ploughed in the winter.

b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?

This kind of infrastructure is so important that I support drawing money from elsewhere to fund a program to bring all our roads up to a proper state of repair. If we make this the top priority for, say, 10 years, we could deal with most of the issues. I would expect that, after that, sustainable budgeting and economic growth, combined with public will, would allow us to keep up. I'd like to conclude by thanking BMVA for their interest in local government and for allowing me the opportunity to respond to these very interesting questions.