



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 order to grow the tourism economy, it is critical to first recognize its importance and existence – something I'm afraid is not well done by the current Council. It is critical for Council membership to acknowledge and embrace the critical importance of tourism to the overall TBM economy. This coming election will allow voters the opportunity to elect a Council who has a good understanding of the tourism economy and perhaps even a Council member who was at one time a member of the BMVA. I was once a "Village stakeholder" while I was one of the 1300 lodging (hotel condominium) unit owners within the BMVA (Weider Lodge).

Also, Council needs to consider Tourism industry impacts at all decision points. In order to do that, I would propose that recommendations by Staff to Council include a new section that outlines Staff's assessment of the impact of a recommended action on the TBM Tourism sector. That assessment will need to include the impact of any recommendation on TBM's tourism sector, and the benefits/impact the recommendation will bring to residents' lifestyles, property values, etc.

b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?

The proposed new staff reporting has no cost.

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 does an excellent job in enhancing and promoting the greater Blue Mountain experience to the benefit of Village stakeholders. I am uniquely aware of that as I was once a Village stakeholder while I was one of the 1300 lodging (hotel Condominium) unit owners within the BMVA (Weider Lodge).

The BMVA continues to do an excellent job in promoting the Blue Mountain experience and organising events for each and every week of the full calendar year. This must be continued, and frankly, this role is best managed by groups

like the BMVA within the TBM. The TBM should be a supporting partner where needed.

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

Absolutely. I would like to see that relationship strengthened and would look forward to BMVA suggestions on how to achieve that.

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.*

The Current Council appears to be poorly focused and not functioning as a team. Each Council member is only one vote on Council, so it is critical that Council work as a team on issues that need attention.

Since many municipal initiatives typically have some involvement with the Province, Council must also have **a good working relationship with the current Province of Ontario Government**. That does not seem to be the case for the current Council.

I have considerable experience in working with other elected officials to implement policy priorities, and I intend to bring that experience to work for TBM voters as a Council team player. While in government, I was also the point person for small businesses and co-authored a report to Cabinet on small business access to capital, financing, jobs and growth
<https://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/publications/1997/ss.html>.

I also have considerable experience in dealing with various Provincial Ministries and a good working relationship with a number of key government Ministers. This is critical in making the TBM case to Provincial government ministries for approval or funding as needed.

Time For A Change at TBM Council!

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

Firstly, the new Council needs to focus on the priority issues facing TBM and not spend valuable time and money on the issues that caused considerable friction and distraction of the Current Council.

Secondly, it is critical that the new Council quickly create a strategic plan for the next term of Council. This plan would then be the guideline by which voters would be able to track the Council's progress. This strategic plan needs to rely on the Sustainable Plan and Official Plan that is already in existence and must include an economic/tourism development plan for the TBM. It should set objectives for delivering on key priorities over the next 4 years. Items coming to Council from staff for decisions should then reference this strategic plan. This strategic plan should be revisited each year for updating, to map progress, and to reflect changes as needed.

Thirdly, Council should communicate its strategic plan and place that plan in front of the public for discussion and consultation.

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?

As I noted above, it is critical that the new Council quickly create a strategic plan for the next term of Council. This plan would then be the guideline by which voters would be able to track the Council's progress. This strategic plan needs to rely on the Sustainable Plan and Official Plan that is already in existence and must include an economic/tourism plan for the TBM. Items coming to Council from staff for decisions should then reference this strategic plan so that the plan does not collect dust on the shelf. This strategic plan should be revisited each year for updating, to map progress, and to reflect changes as needed.

Also, TBM must immediately address the infrastructure deficiencies facing TBM that are creating problems for TBM residents and growth/development issues/friction.

- Outside pressure from the Ministry of Transportation seems to be mounting to widen Highway 26, but that would drive a stake into the heart of TBM's core strength. Efficient roads to and through TBM are needed to support growth, but it is time for a meaningful bypass discussion/plan. That plan needs to come from the TBM residents and ratepayers and a Team Council should undertake that planning exercise immediately.
- Future development must support and not destroy our unique tourism/recreation/agriculture character. However, a Team Council needs to better define that unique tourism/recreation/agriculture character and set that as the guiding principle for future development approvals.
- We don't have the housing stock to support the job growth in our area. A Team Council needs to address that immediately. I have proposed a PPP model that would build attainable housing in partnership with the private sector.
- The lack of effective public transit is increasing the traffic load on our busy roads. A plan to implement public transit within TBM and connecting TBM to other areas needs to be created ASAP.

I am also proposing that the TBM revisit its current relationship with the County. Grey County receives over 26% of its tax revenue from TBM (\$13.8 Million) but the Town doesn't have the equivalent voice on how that money is spent. There is also duplication in service delivery between the County and TBM that is costing the taxpayer money and often producing decisions that don't reflect TBM's interests. The County is not able to provide reliable information on how much County funds are spent in the TBM area, and County tourism spending tends to focus on the entire County and not the TBM.

b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?

- Funds now being spent on an EA dealing with Highway 26 issues should be redirected to a Highway 26 discussion including a bypass option.
- The definition of our unique tourism/recreation/agriculture character needs no further funds allocations.
- I have proposed a PPP model that would build attainable housing in partnership with the private sector. TBM's contribution could be in the form of development charges deferral or holidays and /or surplus TBM lands.
- Improvements in public transit can be self-funded or funded in part with other government capital contributions and a specific TBM fund that is funded by TBM and/or County development charges.
- We need a better deal with the County to allow us to direct our County funds to critical TBM focused long term growth and development strategies. County

development charges collected from TBM projects need to be spent in the TBM.

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?

TBM cannot attract workers if the workers do not have an affordable place to live. TBM needs to act in partnership with the private sector on solving the critical attainable housing shortage. I have outlined my plan for that in the section below.

But, we must forget that business growth is needed as that creates new job opportunities. As an owner of a small business, I know how red tape can limit business growth and job creation. Many businesses I have talked to are also concerned that TBM red tape/regulations are holding them back from growing. If elected, I will support the creation of a red tape committee of Council that will include small business representatives. That Committee will be tasked with the responsibility of reviewing all existing **and future** TBM bylaws to make sure that TBM regulations and bylaws are not restricting business growth and job creation.

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?

We need to address short term (seasonal) housing needs for seasonal workers, and increased long term rentals, and affordable homes for those who want to work **and** live here.

I am proposing that TBM immediately proceed with a PPP tender to build all three versions of attainable housing. TBM can bring the following to the partnership:

- reduced or deferred development charges,
- surplus land,
- design and occupancy control.

TBM should not be responsible for the management of the units but should have control over design and occupancy criteria. The Village can contribute PPP components as well, with the specifics to be negotiated as part of the PPP design work.

b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?

The PPP should be fully funded by the private sector except for the deferral of development charges and surplus land contribution by the TBM.

Also, with a restructured relationship with the County and TBM, the development charges that the County collects from the growing TBM development industry can be redirected towards this initiative.

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?

Short Term Accommodation (STA) units play an important role in housing visitors to our community who want to enjoy our great recreational facilities and spend money here. Our current STA rules appear to be working well, and the existing STA stock should be maintained – except for those units that are not complying with safety guidelines or are creating a constant disturbance for the area residents... in other words, not complying with our bylaws. STA noise and disturbance penalties need to have some impact!

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

New STA stock must be carefully planned so that it can **co-exist** with existing and new developments and **complement, not conflict with that new development.**

As a member of the new Council I will **support the current STA rules** and **where the zoning is not yet STA restrictive**, I will support new STA stock in new development areas ONLY if it can be shown to co-exist in harmony with the stock – be that residential or commercial. I would also like to see STA restrictions added to the property title so that future property owners are fully aware of the STA restrictions that may apply to that property.

We must also ensure that our STA rules are properly adhered to and that those STA operators who do play by the rules are not disadvantaged by those who do not. We must continue to enforce our current STA rules.

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?

I see no reason to cut TBM services at this time. However, we need to address the duplication in service delivery between the County and TBM that is costing the taxpayer money and often producing decisions that don't reflect TBM's interests.

TBM also spends may too much money on outside consultants who often tell us what we or TBM staff already know! These monies can be better spent on other fiscal challenges

Ben Franklin was right. If you watch the pennies, then the dollars will take care of themselves. That was how I ran my Ministry when I was in provincial government and responsible for one of the largest Provincial budget items. I carefully looked at all Ministry expenditures, even the small ones, to make sure that taxpayer pennies were spent wisely. That focus is needed on Council.

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

If possible, I would support tax decreases or at a minimum a better allocation of current tax dollars, but we need to look at spending efficiencies **first** to help alleviate any revenue pressure.

There is also duplication in service delivery between the County and TBM that is costing the taxpayer money. This duplication must be eliminated as part of a total revisit of our County relationship.

Many businesses I have talked to are concerned that TBM red tape/regulations are like an indirect tax, holding them back from growing their business. It is also impacting many service delivery solutions we need to proceed with. For instance, the six-month test pilot of a full day scheduled bus service between Town of The Blue Mountains, Collingwood and Wasaga Beach involved at least 5 levels of local government!

If elected, I will support the creation of a red tape committee of Council that will include small business representatives. That Committee will be tasked with the responsibility of reviewing all existing **and future** TBM bylaws to make sure that TBM regulations and bylaws are not restricting business growth.

With a restructured relationship with the County and TBM, the development charges that the County collects from the growing TBM development industry can be redirected towards TBM fiscal challenges in lieu of tax increases.

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?

The public transportation need is across County lines, within the TBM border and between the lower tier towns within the County. Public transportation can also be one of the solutions to lower traffic on our heavily travelled roads – Highway 26 for instance. I fully support the six-month test pilot of a full day scheduled bus service between Town of The Blue Mountains, Collingwood and Wasaga Beach and look forward to its results.

While not the most environmentally efficient solution, I would also support looking at an “Uber option” for some of the public transportation needs in the area – similar to what is now being implemented in some other jurisdictions. Other “localized” transportation services should be investigated and piloted.

b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?

I fully support public transportation operating costs being self-funded. However, for capital costs, a restructured relationship with the County and TBM, can provide fiscal resources such as the development charges that the County collects from the growing TBM development industry.

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?

The Georgian Trails is a 32km gravel trail that runs from Collingwood to Meaford near/along Highway 26. It has numerous access points along the way. There is a need to connect a new Mountain Road trail or the Georgian Trail route to the section of bike trails running through the Windfall development (yet to be assumed by the TBM) towards the Village. I would fully support a plan that makes trail cycling easier from Collingwood to BMV, especially if it provided an option to avoid road routes and connected to the existing Georgian Trails system.

b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?

The connection of trails to the existing system should be funded by the County, TBM and other interested parties.

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

Recreational cycling is a main attraction for TBM and Council needs to focus immediately on those road issues that are unsafe. I would fully support 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. Some of these routes require County involvement and

we need progress on some of the roundabouts that are being talked about but not yet in the planning or build stage.

b) How would you organize & finance such initiatives?

Funds needed to support road improvements can come from a better allocation of funds currently sent to the County for general County use. These funds need to be spent in the TBM area.

Submitted by:

Rob Sampson,
Candidate for Council
The Town of The Blue Mountains