

Dear Mayor and Councillors

After the significant public outcry in 2021, the hiking groups we manage thought the issue of access to hiking trails within the Town of the Blue Mountains (TBM) was resolved. Or, at very least, the Public, Bruce Trail Conservancy (BTC) and the Ministry of Natural Resources, all major stakeholders, would be consulted before any changes were made. We understood that the restrictions on parking remained in effect (By-law 2003-11) but that TBM would not implement them by posting “no parking” signage or other sledge hammer measures. We were dismayed to discover that TBM has implemented some extreme restrictions in the form of no parking anywhere close to trails and parking fees.

We are very fortunate to live in this beautiful area. Part of that beauty comes from the Escarpment and the many trails and parks available to the public. Many of these happen to be inside the borders of The Town of Blue Mountains. We see you as custodians of this heritage. So, to block access to any part of it, without consultation with external stakeholders, seems to us a betrayal of trust.

Furthermore, we believe you should be encouraging hiking, not only for tourism but for the good of the community. Collingwood supports 70km of hiking trails as well as the Georgian Trail, none of which have restrictions or fees at their many access points.

TBM’s County Forests and Conservation areas would not be popular or accessible if not for the Bruce Trail Conservancy. BTC does not charge to hike its trails and volunteers spend many hours working to maintain them. By charging for parking, you have now swooped in to make a profit on their generosity and community spirit. Shame!

Most of us belong to the BTC and find it distressing that you do not appear to consult the organization, yet are willing to gain financially from its efforts without any attempt to share. Would TBM charge for children and families to use the public playgrounds within its borders? Why are you charging to use a “hiking” playground that provides such an important physical contribution to people’s wellbeing.

Here are some of our major access concerns:

1. Access to the trails inside the Pretty River Provincial Park

With parking signs on both sides of the road, the only parking options are a very small 3 car lot provided by the province and a parking area for snowmobilers. Both of these lots are over a kilometre from the major BTC trailhead. We understand that the "no parking" signage was in response to safety concerns. In our opinion, the safety issues are now much worse as hikers have two options:

- a. Walk along the road for a total of over two kilometres when, presumably, TBM does not want pedestrian traffic on the road
- b. Walk up the snowmobile trail. Snowmobilers do not expect to find pedestrians on their trail and travel at speed. We have seen several near misses when it proved difficult for hikers to get off the trail in time.

Pretty River is a provincial park with most, if not all, trails maintained by the Bruce Trail Conservancy. We would like to know:

- a. Was there any consultation with either the province or the BTC before the signage went into effect?
- b. Is this a winter related issue driven by the complaints of snow plow drivers or is it year round?
- c. Was creating new parking close to the trailhead by widening the road or creating a new parking lot in consultation with the province considered?
- d. Would enforcing "no parking" on one side of the road only and reducing the speed limit be a first considered step to safety?

2. No Parking at the trailhead to the Margaret Paul Side Trail (end of the 18th Side Road).

Cars parking at the trailhead are being ticketed notwithstanding that it is a dead end and not blocking anyone's driveway. We would like to understand:

- a. Why no parking is being enforced in this area? If people are blocking people's driveways tow them.
- b. Again, was the BTC consulted?
- c. Was any consideration given to extending the entrance to the trailhead (which is an unopened road allowance in winter) so that more cars could park?

3. Paid parking at Loree Forest

We do not believe that the public should have to pay to access any trails. This is normally one of the few activities that individuals and families at any income level can enjoy without restraint.

That said, the standard parking fee for other areas is \$10.00 for the entire day. TBM's decision to charge \$10.00 per hour is exorbitant by comparison. We do not understand the rationale for the amount or the decision to charge for entrance to trails which are maintained by the BTC and not TBM.

We also understand that, in fiscal 2022, revenues are significantly below forecast. We suspect this is because no one is going to Loree Forest if they do not have a resident parking pass and therefore have to pay this exorbitant parking fee. Once again, access to a beautiful part of the escarpment has been limited by the TBM's decision. We would like to know:

- a. Was any comparison done with other parking fees at other trails and their success or failure to meet anticipated revenue?
- b. Is the net cost of administering parking fees positive or negative given the small revenues?
- c. Was any consideration given to sharing revenues with the BTC, since it maintains the trails?

As you can see, we have questions, opinions and suggestions about TBM's direction with respect to access to the escarpment. We would appreciate the opportunity to present to you in person and to discuss resolution of the parking issue in a way that might work for all stakeholders.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Patricia Dunbar, Heather McCleary