



Town of The Blue Mountains

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OFFICE OF: Mayor Alar Soever

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: 519-599-3131 Ext 400

Sent via E-mail

March 2, 2021

Ms. Julie Tipping

Email: [REDACTED]

Dear Ms. Tipping:

I have been tasked by Council to respond to your letter of February 1, 2021. (See attached Council resolution.) Thank you for your comments on a variety of topics. I am struck by the somewhat different perception you seem to have of the facts and how Council deals with matters, as expressed in your letter. I will try to address your comments and provide clarity on each of the topics you raise.

20 Alice Street Redevelopment Proposal

This redevelopment was the subject of a fulsome public process and discussion at Council. After a public meeting on September 16, 2020, during which there were 1 hour and 42 minutes of presentation and discussion of issues, a follow-up staff report was brought to Committee of the Whole on January 12, 2021, on which after another 30 minutes of debate, Committee of the Whole ("COW") recommended turning the project down, largely on the parking issue. When the COW recommendation came to Council for ratification on January 27, 2021, another 48 minutes of debate ensued, after which the project was approved, but only after Council was satisfied that the parking issue raised by local residents would be dealt with by means of a Traffic Brief and Parking Analysis & Plan (see motion below).

THAT with respect to Staff Report P2878 20 Alice Street - Proposed Zoning By-law Amendment PDS.21.01, that Council of the Town of The Blue Mountains directs that a Traffic Brief and Parking Analysis & Plan shall be required to be submitted to the Town as part of a complete Site Plan application and shall be to the satisfaction of the Town prior to the Director of Planning exercising its delegated authority to issue Site Plan Approval;

AND THAT the parking analysis and plan shall confirm that future residents of the development will not exacerbate the existing on- street parking situation and that future residents are informed accordingly through mechanisms through the Site Plan Agreement

In light of the history of the matter, I fail to see how you can support your statement that we "had absolutely no concern about what the neighbours regarded as a problem".

In addition, Council also had to consider the fact that the proposed redevelopment of the site is consistent and in conformity with applicable Provincial, County, and Town planning policies, so while Council could have turned it down, if we had done so the applicant would simply have appealed it to a Local Planning Appeal Tribunal ("LPAT") and likely won. This would have resulted in an additional \$50,000 or more in costs to our taxpayers with no change in the outcome.

I would also point out that your letter contains factual errors in that we are not narrowing the driveway, but merely acknowledging that the existing driveway is existing non-conforming in that it is narrower and closer to the lot boundary than allowed for. Also the units are not 200-300 sq. ft. as you suggest but range in size from 242 to 804 sq. ft., with over half the units larger than the 300 sq. ft. your letter seems to suggest is the maximum size.

Application for Telecommunications Tower

When applications like this come before us there is a requirement that we hold a public meeting to allow the proponent to present the proposal and give the public a chance to comment. While I would agree with you that some of the information presented was incomplete, I would disagree that Council did not seem to have much knowledge of the project. I recall that during the 2 hours and 11 minutes of discussion, it was clear that some Council members had done their research and brought up issues including:

- the fact there were, as of yet, no contracted users for the tower, and that it was the business practice of the proponent to build towers hoping to attract users later, by securing a site thus making it more difficult for others to permit other new towers;
- the fact that there was little research on the effect of radiation on specialized medical devices such as might be used by participants at EFL;
- questioning the range limitations quoted by the proponent;

Members of the public also expressed some of these same concerns. In the end the proponent was forced to admit there would be the need for another tower to service the Lora Bay area, and agreed to provide additional information on issues raised and consult with neighbours.

As no decisions are made at public meetings and a subsequent report will come to Council once all the information is received, only then will a recommendation be made as to whether the Town will support this application as part of the CRTC process.

Transportation

Public transportation eventually comes to all communities as an efficient, environmentally sound way to move people. It supports our economy and brings employees to the businesses that serve us. Currently the Town spends less than \$15 per household on public transit, a small investment relative to the benefits it brings.

Employment, Low Wages and Shopping

These are issues which we don't control as a Lower Tier municipality. A lot of it is governed by the law of supply and demand. Many of our business owners do pay more than minimum wage, and this drives up prices, and then our residents who could afford to shop locally go to Costco in Orillia or Barrie, instead of shopping local. As for the mix of businesses we have, all businesses are allowed to make application as long as their plans conform to existing legislation. Council must manage the situation within the limits of the legislation.

Attainable Housing

Attainable Housing is a real need if we hope to retain the services we need in our community. This includes medical personnel, teachers, retail workers and the like. While we would like to serve all segments of the population, we have to balance that desire with being fiscally responsible. That is why we are targeting a demographic who can pay enough rent to allow the project to be feasible and support itself, so as to not unduly burden our taxpayers. I would also point out that taxpayers already support the County's Affordable Housing Programs to the tune of about \$2.4 million dollars, or almost \$300 per household, through their County taxes. We have deliberately targeted a demographic group who can afford to pay rent, want to live and work here and contribute to our community, but are not well enough off to pay market rates in our Town.

Town Employees

We are much more than a Town of just over 7,000 people. We have just as many people who are seasonal residents and are not reflected in our census population. We also have 2.5 M visitors per year. Some people compare us to Meaford, but in almost all categories except census population, we are much larger than Meaford.

While we have a 36% smaller census population than Meaford, because we have 49% seasonal dwellings, we actually must serve 41% more households than Meaford.

- The 77% to 95% higher value of the average home in the TBM and the 575% larger Commercial/Industrial tax base, result in us having a 122% larger Assessment Base
- The larger number of residential properties and the commercial/industrial taxpayers we serve result in us having an operational budget 72% higher than Meaford
- This we do with a staff which is only 56% larger than Meaford's
- Yes, our staff are more qualified and higher paid, yet in terms of a percentage of operational expenditures the cost is exactly the same as Meaford, and in fact on average each employee is responsible for 10% more expenditures than in Meaford.

More important than the statistics above are the results achieved. Since 2010 Meaford's tax rate increased by 37.6%, while increase in the tax rate in The Blue Mountains was only 8.3%. Currently the tax rate in the TBM is 54% lower than Meaford's.

The importance of having highly qualified, hard working staff was recently highlighted when the TBM was one of only 48 of 444 municipalities to apply for Phase 2 Federal-Provincial Safe Restart Agreement funding. We were awarded \$385,000 to offset COVID related costs, relieving our taxpayers of this burden.

No bonus was paid for some staff for the pandemic over the holidays. Council did approve overtime payments to some staff who had to come in to deal with a COVID outbreak in one of our departments.

The Town has very restrictive policies about payments for extra days worked and unused vacation. Any unused vacation time greater than one week at the end of the year will be forfeited and all vacation time carry-over must be utilized by December 31st of the following year. Members of the Management Team who are required to work additional hours due to the nature of their responsibilities receive time off in lieu of overtime. Time off in lieu of overtime may not be carried over, in whole or in part, from one (1) calendar year to another.

In this instance although all members of staff had planned to take the time off with their families over the holidays, they came in to work with the Health Unit on contact tracing, rearranging work schedules, securing alternate forms of service delivery, and issuing information to inform the public of the COVID outbreak, all to keep our community safe and services functioning. I am distressed that you would be “astonished” that Council would compensate them for their dedication to our community.

7 to 0 Votes

It should not surprise anyone that many votes are 7-0. Most on Council share a common vision for our community, that shared by a large majority of our residents. Those who ran on, and best articulated that vision were elected, those who didn’t were not. I would also point out that many times, through debate and discussion during Council meetings, we work toward consensus and change the wording of motions to achieve unanimity. I can assure you no items are decided before meetings.

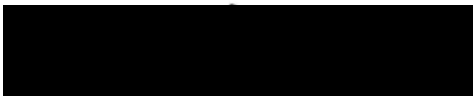
Unpermitted Projects and Dumping

Town Staff work diligently and constantly to enforce all Town By-laws rules, regulations and agreements. I am unaware of any un-permitted projects or dumping. Please advise me immediately of any unpermitted projects or dumping.

Council Behavior

All of Council is passionate about our community and works very hard to fulfil the mandate they were tasked with when they were elected. Sometimes this requires showing leadership and standing up for what we were elected to accomplish. This Council has taken great strides forward in engaging with the public, but that does not mean we will not be passionate about fulfilling our mandate.

Yours sincerely,



Mayor Alar Soever
Town of The Blue Mountains

Attachments Council Resolution

CC: Council, Town of The Blue Mountains (via e-mail)
 Shawn Everitt, CAO, Town of The Blue Mountains (via email)
 Department File -C2048



The Town of Blue Mountains, Council Meeting

Date: Monday, February 8, 2021

Moved by: Councillor Uram

Seconded by: Councillor Bordignon

THAT Council of the Town of The Blue Mountains receives the February 4, 2021 correspondence from Julie Tipping and requests Mayor Soever to respond to Mrs. Tipping

The motion is Carried

Feb. 1, 2021

To: Mayor Soever, All Council Members of The Town of the Blue Mountains, CAO S. Everitt

Firstly, I would like to commend Paula Hope for standing up for her community, when addressing parking on Alice St. conversion project of the old Funeral Home. While watching the meeting it seemed that all, except Paula, had absolutely no concern about what the neighbours regarded as a problem. Not one mention of garbage collection at that new conversion site and imagine even narrowing the drive in to satisfy the developer. What about snow accumulation? How can the town accept a development that is like shoe boxes (200-300 sq. ft.) for residents, and developer claiming long term leases. And the developer is suggesting that DC's be waived. Unbelievable scenario for the residents of Alice St. and for our town and our tax dollars.

Watching the meeting regarding the communications tower showed, that there are many neighbours in Thornbury that care about this area, health of residents and the area's beauty. The expertise and time that was spent to dispute the placement of the tower was very encouraging to see and hear. One would question having a meeting when the staff and council didn't seem to have much knowledge on the project which became very apparent. It was wonderful to see our neighbours standing up for this area. Radiation is a problem for some and for a company to state the "field" would only go to the baseball diamonds and then they would put another one near Lora Bay was astounding. We live near the baseball diamonds and have absolutely no problem with cell service at all as our neighbours in the rural part also commented. We question the town's ability to represent the residents after seeing this meeting. One should not bend over backwards to every developer just for money.

Transportation has been brought up also as needed. After witnessing the massive influx of visitors throughout the pandemic, with advertising inviting visitors to come to our great community I question the spending for years to come on buses running up and down highway # 26. We have seen that our nature paths, beaches, and quaint town have been overrun by tourists. They will still need cars to get to the country so if the thinking is it will save on traffic one would question that. Employment purposes are perhaps the only thing that would be a possibility. Even Rob Potter while speaking about the Alice St. development suggested that everyone would have a car, or two, that would live in those apartments. It seems that hand picking suggestions as to what is "needed" doesn't always add up.

Employment is an issue here but also low wages are an issue. It has been suggested that the expensive tourist type stores, grocery stores etc. can't afford to pay their staff more. It is hard for this to be swallowed as we see most business owners living in not "million dollar homes" but "million and a half plus " homes. It might sound good for who? It is an issue that we as residents here, after living in busy communities, find concerning for our young people. You wonder why you can't keep youth here, are you kidding? For those living in Thornbury, shopping is limited as most of the stores are expensive, tourist types. We live in Grey County and therefore shopping, like our neighbours, towards Meaford and Owen Sound, that is shopping local. I am sure that those who live in the Craighleith, Blue Mountain Village area including Windfall area would not shop in Thornbury but shop for groceries, clothing and other essentials in Collingwood. This is supporting the area of Simcoe County. Unfortunately people's shopping patterns are hard to break. One grocery store in Thornbury and three gas stations and now notice of two cannabis stores in the Town of Thornbury alone seems that priorities are a little out of whack.

Building attainable housing for those earning \$40,000-\$100,000 is extremely insulting to our youth that are being paid low wages. You are complaining that they aren't staying? Working for \$14.00 per hour and working 30 hours per week or even split shifts, even if you have two

working people living together still doesn't meet the criteria, as they have less hours in "off" season. I would have thought that as business people this would have been realized, however, if it has been realized it has not been admitted. Suggesting that businesses pay a living wage was dismissed as it was stated "they can't afford it." This is embarrassing to say the least for the residents of Thornbury. Why are we treating low wage earners in this way, especially when so many town employees are on the sunshine list?

We are very astounded to see that a bonus was paid for some staff for the pandemic over the holidays, these staff are salaried employees and many are on the sunshine list. This, for a town of just over 7,000 is unbelievable. We as permanent residents won't get a tax break for spending our lives indoors due to the pandemic with all the visitors. Maybe this is fairly being discussed?

We, as residents, have put up with many issues during the pandemic. Having so many people visiting this area after multiple forms of advertising to come visit this area on line, newspaper articles, radio advertising and television, even just recently. As full time residents we find that we have had to retreat to our homes to keep ourselves safe. Many in this town have come here to live because of previous health issues and looking for a safe healthy existence, that sadly has been eroded. Yet, the Town has spent thousands and thousands of dollars to make life better for the tourists and totally ignoring the residents. The only positive that has come out of this is the grooming of the Georgian Trail and trails at Tomahawk. Hopefully this will remain in place for future years. This was a small cost in comparison of other things that we see being needlessly done.

While watching the communications committee meeting we realized that discussion was very good and we also note that during council meetings there seems not to be a lot of discussion. However, if there isn't a lot of discussion why is it that the voting is very consistent as usually 7-0. This would appear to suggest that items are decided prior to the meeting, that might indicate a non democratic process. Councillors and the Mayor are representatives of the residents of the town. They are not representing Consultants, Planners or Developers. Trying to speak with some departments on development in an intelligent manner regarding drainage, density, trees and existing character residents are met with condescending attitude. Lack of response to questions on the environment regarding certain "un permitted" projects is concerning. Georgian Bay needs to be protected and we don't see the Town focusing on this, letting developers over develop the shores and ignoring regulations for sites. Old sites not remediated and ignored on Town property. Un permitted dumping by some being ignored. This all goes to the character of our Town and its "fudging rules" just to help developers or cover up issues. This must stop.

We note that Mr. Sampson's conduct in the recent council meeting speaking on the communication committee findings was very concerning to the electorate. His anger and rant seemed unbelievable on issues that are currently happening. To reply to a letter months down the road is unacceptable.

It is apparent that most council and the mayor don't care about the people who elected them. If it doesn't concern businesses and developers then it isn't important. That is a sad state of affairs!

Politics requires certain skills, genuine friendliness, courtesy, the ability to bend rather than break and those without them do enormous damage.

Julie Tipping