

September 11, 2024

From: Cim Nunn and Lynn Keays

To: Town of the Blue Mountains Committee of the Whole

With regard to the proposed route for a force main down Bay Street East, I am appearing before you to urge this committee to spend more time reviewing this decision. As you know, the large-scale Campus of Care housing development has meant TBM needs to expand its capacity to pump waste water from Thornbury West and Lora Bay, through the Mill St. pumping Station, to the Water Treatment Plant.

Last year, Council approved a staff recommendation to route the new “force main” under Bay Street East. No real consideration was given to any other route, and residents were only made aware of this decision after the fact. Construction would mean clear-cutting an 18-metre-wide swath down Bay Street East, removing hundreds of healthy, mature trees, and following completion, the town would apply the “full urban profile” standard which staff developed last year – a wider paved surface, with hard curbs, a sidewalk or multi-use trail, and no parking permitted. It would destroy the character of the street. And it is all unnecessary.

I’m concerned that this significant decision has been reached hastily, as it appears the town is under pressure from the developer to show progress. Its impact, in the short and medium term, would certainly affect residents on Bay Street East, but given the scale of the proposed housing development, the as yet unknown costs of increasing the town’s waste water pumping capacity, and the recently announced plan to allocate the town’s finite water resources, it has significant consequences for everyone who calls the Town of the Blue Mountains home.

No doubt you are aware of the petition that has been circulating for several weeks. At the time of sending this deputation, more than 1900 people have signed the petition (and more than 70 have added comments), which calls on TBM Council to identify alternative options that will not have such a devastating environmental and social impact on Bay Street East and Bayview Park. Supporters of the petition come from all parts of TBM, surrounding areas, the GTA and beyond, reflecting that this matter is a significant concern to TBM residents, family members and friends, and visitors.

This decision to move forward with a huge housing development will have a transformative effect on our town. It will test our commitment to preserving and protecting the town’s character. It will put pressure on, not just the capacity to pump waste water, but every imaginable infrastructure. It will change this town forever.

As such, I believe it is worthy of further, more thoughtful consideration, allowing this Committee, Council, staff, and especially residents, the opportunity to carefully examine all alternative routes for the force main, to know beforehand the costs of all possible routes, including Bay Street, and to ensure any review and comparison includes factors beyond engineering considerations.

At the same time, taking the time to get this decision right would give staff the time to finish the process of developing appropriate standards for street designs, ensuring the character of the range of streets in town is protected where it is clear the “full urban profile” model is not appropriate.

The original impetus for the Campus of Care – the 166 Long-Term Care beds allocated by the province – has been granted a two year extension. The town embraced the idea of a huge housing development to accompany the LTC beds several years ago – but now finds itself racing to keep up with infrastructure demands created by what could end up being the largest housing development in our town’s history.

With the extension from the province, you have the time to get this right, to reconsider the route of the force main and conduct a thorough evaluation of other, alternative routes, and to revisit the current, rigid standards for streets following road reconstruction, and to give residents a chance to participate in the process.