

October 23, 2024

To Town Clerk, Town of The Blue Mountains

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From: Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association Planning Subcommittee

Re: COW Meeting Oct 29, Item B-9-1-FAF.24.119

**Comments on the proposed Centralized Planning Services Model proposed by Grey County**

Staff Report PDS.24.134 is well written and represents a thorough and objective analysis of the proposal to centralize planning functions at the County level.

The strongest argument for the current planning framework is that local staff are best-positioned to understand local perspectives toward planning issues. This is perhaps part of the rationale for the Province's direction to remove some planning responsibilities from a number of upper tier jurisdictions of the Province, in addition to the objective of speeding up approvals.

The importance of local perspectives in planning is highlighted in the following statements in the above-noted report:

"...every development or policy project may require a unique approach to gain the information and detail required to make an informed decision."

"Moving to a centralized planning system at the County level may eliminate the benefit of having both a local and county planning perspective on growth."

"Planning is not a technical process and often there is no right or wrong answer and recommendations are informed by public engagement at the local level."

The report acknowledges that planning is essentially a political process, informed by public engagement. The Town's engagement with its citizens on planning issues is above standard and reflects the concern that rapid growth (the second highest in the Province) provides challenges to sustainable services and natural heritage protections. TBM residents and customers appreciate the accessibility of staff and on-site presence which would not be sustainable if consolidated at the County level.

The report cautions:

“A centralized system may also reduce the breadth of our existing planning processes such as enhanced public engagement, public outreach and communications, and other functions that the municipal level currently undertakes.”

“The Town currently goes above and beyond minimum Planning Act requirements as Council has directed, and is proud, that development and policy projects are required to go beyond those minimums. Through a centralized system that is looking to implement efficiencies, many of these enhanced processes could be eliminated to simply meet minimum provincial requirements.”

PDS.24.134 mentions two concerns with the existing planning regime: recruitment issues and duplication of services. With respect to recruitment, the report refers to the ongoing review of job descriptions and titles but perhaps more attention is needed to compensation in particular as a means of attracting talent to this important function. And concern with duplication of efforts could lead to a decision to download approval of plans of subdivision, as has been previously proposed by the Blue Mountain Ratepayers' Association. It should also be noted that the report estimates that there is only a 10% overlap in responsibilities and resources between TBM and Grey County Planning. This seems an insufficient level of savings to justify such a major and disruptive change to the current Planning model.

BMRA agrees with the suggestions in the report that the investment of time and the accountability of local staff in the context of TBM policies, plan reviews and customer service produce more favourable outcomes and success than would otherwise be the case if staff, policies and efforts were centralized at the County level. Therefore, the BMRA does not support centralizing planning services.