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## NEWSLETTER - FALL 2009

### BSRA Annual Meeting – August 29, 2009

9:30 a.m. Coffee      10:00 a.m. Meeting

At our meeting, in St. Peter's Church Hall, north of St. Joseph, east side of highway 21, we will present several important ideas about our environment, our properties, and the threats to our present and future well-being. We will seek your input on important shoreline issues. Show your commitment to the on-going health, protection, and development of the lakeshore community. It is important for all lakeshore residents have at least one representative present at the BSRA Annual Meeting.

### BSRA Continues to Work Toward Improvements in Lake Water Quality:

Utilizing funding provided by the Municipality of Bluewater, BSRA continues to conduct water quality tests in the ravines and in Lake Huron at four locations in Bluewater. BSRA also uses this funding to facilitate remedial projects designed to reduce sources of contamination. The first of these projects has focused on the St. Joseph watershed. The program is administered by the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority and includes an advisory group which includes property owners on the watershed as well as BSRA. Additional funding has been obtained from senior levels of government. The program identifies potential sources of contamination, assists property owners in developing a plan for corrective action, and assists in acquiring additional funding. Over twenty three projects have been undertaken during the last two years.

With funding from BSRA and other sources in 2009, ABCA will be starting on another program in Bluewater focused on the Ridgeway watershed. The first community meeting will occur in the late summer or early fall.

### Ravines and Health Issues

As testing results over the last ten years have shown and most lakeshore residents understand, water in the ravines and streams that flow into Lake Huron in the Municipality of Bluewater have always measured over the safe limit for recreational purposes. Recent published research by the Ministry of Environment and the University of Guelph concludes that pollutants in the water in these ravines and streams are the major causes of poor water quality in the Lake. In 2008 no beaches tested by the health unit in Bluewater would meet the Blue Flag water quality criteria.

For three years, BSRA has been asking the Huron County Medical Officer of Health to conduct a health risk assessment of the waters in the ravines. While initially there was reluctance, the new Huron County MoH has agreed to review the request.

### PRISM 911 is Coming to Huron County

PRISM 911 (Protective Response Interactive Services Management) is coming to Huron County this fall and you, as a shoreline resident, will be affected. This program is an interactive telephone notification system that can be used to alert residents about emergency situations (e.g. boil water advisories, chemical spills, crime alerts and lost children.) At BSRA's Annual Meeting on August 29th, find out how the program works and how you will be involved.

## **Property Taxes Collected versus Services Provided: Inequity Among Bluewater Wards?**

Our Municipality consists of three primary interest groups: agriculture, urban settlement areas, and the shoreline community. If Bluewater is to become a true "*community*" with which all its residents can proudly identify, the interests of all three groups must be considered and the legitimate concerns of any area cannot be ignored. Over the past 9 years, BSRA has publicly identified the inequity that exists with respect to the property taxes collected and the direct services provided to each of the seven wards.

Shortly after amalgamation, BSRA requested Bluewater Council to adopt certain measures to reduce the existing inequity. The delay in providing any meaningful response led to BSRA's retaining legal counsel, establishing our reserve fund, and petitioning the Ontario Municipal Board to restructure the Municipality to ensure effective representation for the interests of its shoreline residents. In 2003, our two shoreline wards were created. Subsequently, Bluewater introduced the "*Road Grant Program*" which provided, under certain circumstances, for the reimbursement of some of the expenses incurred by shoreline property owners to maintain the unassumed roads accessing their shoreline residences. After nine years in which the issue has been an ongoing point of discussion, it is time to assess the position of the shoreline resident relative to the balance of our Municipality. Have we achieved equity within Bluewater?

Consider the following:

- From 2003 to 2009, the **residential taxpayers' share of total taxes has risen** from 80.8% to 85.4%; farmlands declined from 10.3% to 7.8%; and all other tax classes combined declined from 8.9% to 6.9%.
- "Current Value Assessment" (CVA) has produced a **shift of the total tax burden to lakefront properties** from the balance of the Municipality. In 2008, the shoreline wards represented 41.4 % of the total tax revenue, and 48.4 % of total Bluewater residential taxes, vs. only 39.2 % and 46.5 % respectively in 2004.
- Bluewater ratepayers whose latest increase in CVA is less than the percentage reduction in the tax rate established by the Municipality will actually see a reduction in their 2009 property taxes. However, almost all lakefront residents will see an increase in their property taxes, whereas a significant portion of the **balance of Bluewater will see a reduction in their taxes**. This will exacerbate the problem, resulting in a **further shift of the tax burden in 2009 and in each of the following three years**.
- Although there is little Bluewater can do to limit the negative effects of the provincial system of current value assessment, **our local Council does control where they will spend their tax revenues**. An analysis of Bluewater budget data makes it clear that the Municipality spends disproportionately more on direct services to the other five wards, whether measured by taxes collected, number of properties, or number of electors. The Road Grants represent only a very small portion of the Municipality roads budget, and have declined as a percentage of the total since the program began.
- The only Bluewater taxpayers who have to pay money additional to their property taxes to maintain roads accessing their residences are those residents of Hay West and Stanley West whose residences are accessed by roads not assumed by the Municipality. The Road Grant Program does not cover all expenses incurred to maintain the unassumed residence-access roads.

If you think this situation is unfair, as the BSRA Board does, talk to your neighbours in your subdivision, and **bring your suggestions** of how the inequity may be addressed to our Annual Meeting on August 29<sup>th</sup>. Remember too that your vote in the 2010 municipal election could result in the election of candidates who have demonstrated a commitment to reduce the inequity.

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*Jan Purvis*  
President

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Communications Director