



NEWSLETTER - SUMMER 2009

NOTE CAREFULLY: The BSRA Annual General Meeting will take place Saturday August 29 in the St. Peter's Church Hall just north of St. Joseph on Highway 21. Coffee at 9:30 a.m. Meeting at 10:00.

Bluewater Highway Improvements – Be Ready for Reconstruction on Highway 21

At a November 2008 Public Information Session, officials from the Ontario Ministry of Transportation announced plans to upgrade Highway 21. Our part of the highway rehabilitation project will extend from St. Joseph north to Bayfield. This reconstruction will occur from 2010 to 2012 and will include rehabilitation of the pavement, intersection improvements, improvements to private and commercial entrances, roadside safety and drainage improvements. Meanwhile, emergency repairs have already been done on the Bayfield bridge, and more permanent repairs will be completed to the bridge during 2009. Reconstruction has also begun south of Grand Bend. Throughout the reconstruction zones, traffic will be limited to one lane while the work is being done.

The Ministry of Transportation would like to see a reduction in the number of service roads accessing Highway 21, and will encourage the development of service roads to connect subdivisions where feasible. Mr. McIntyre assured BSRA members that the Ministry will not be closing accesses to shoreline subdivisions. He also indicated that the state of repair of the highway south of St. Joseph to Grand Bend is reasonably good and will not require upgrading in the near future.

Poor Water Quality in Bayfield Prevents Blue Flag Beach Award

In November of 2007, the BSRA Board was asked by Municipal Council to prepare a proposal to investigate the possibility that Bluewater's public beaches might apply to become qualified for the prestigious international "Blue Flag". This is a recognition given to beaches around the world that meet high standards for cleanliness, safety, swimming water quality, and educational programs. The BSRA Board saw this as a good opportunity to place added emphasis on the importance of improved water quality in Lake Huron. In December 2007 and May 2008, BSRA and Bayfield Ratepayers Association representatives presented proposals on what must be done to upgrade our public beaches so they can meet the Blue Flag standards. They recommended that Council undertake the difficult task of reducing the long-standing E-coli contamination levels in the Lake, and to develop a plan to meet 26 other criteria such as safety precautions, parking, sanitary facilities, etc. The Blue Flag water quality criterion requires that no more than 20% of the E.coli readings taken during the swimming season can be above 100 cfu per 100 mL water. Council resolved to work on the Bayfield Main Beach in the first stage and then other Bluewater public beaches in future years. Council also decided to proceed with work to help the Bayfield Marina meet a different set of standards to qualify as a Blue Flag Marina. The standards for marinas do not include water quality for swimming. A budget was established, considerable work was done, and the applications for beach and marina were sent to the International Blue Flag Jury.

In June 2009, the Blue Flag was awarded to the Bayfield Marina. Unfortunately, and contrary to Bluewater's expectations, the Blue Flag was denied to the Bayfield Beach when the jury learned that the water quality in the Lake at Bayfield during the year 2008 had failed to reach the required standard. The Huron County Health Unit, who took the readings, has explained that they had originally sent data indicating that the Bayfield water quality was at an acceptable level. However, they later revealed that additional data which they had collected but not submitted indicated unsatisfactory readings more than 20% of the time. It was this more complete data that caused the Blue Flag Jury to reject the Bayfield Beach application. Meanwhile, the Board of BSRA is continuing its longstanding effort to persuade Bluewater and the provincial Ministries to make more vigorous efforts in helping to reduce pollutants in the Lake. Only if the level of contamination is reduced will our beaches fall within the Blue Flag criteria. BSRA has requested that all beach water quality testing be reported promptly, completely, accurately, consistently, openly, and in a form that represents the actual water quality conditions in the Lake.

Grand Bend (Tri-Municipal) Sewer Project: Get Ready South-West Bluewater!

As briefly stated in our Spring Newsletter, three municipalities have agreed to expand the Grand Bend Sewage System to service Grand Bend, Pinery Park, Lakeshore communities north to Huron Road 84 (St Joseph), and Dashwood. Residents of the area affected by the sewer project received an information letter from the Municipality in late May. The letter provided background on the project, the start of construction on the sewage treatment plant and the pending start of the combined Bluewater and South Huron Collection Systems.

The municipality of Lambton Shores takes the lead role and a modern treatment plant will replace the old Grand Bend lagoons. It is likely that the collection system for the area between Grand Bend and Port Blake, the area from Port Blake to St. Joseph, and the Dashwood area will be developed together. Bluewater has stated that it has started the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Bluewater portion of the collection system. The report could be complete in a little over a year. During the EA, two public Information sessions will be held. When the EA is complete Bluewater will seek infrastructure funding before tendering the project.

The costs for the project will be borne by property owners. However, the municipalities have been successful in applying for provincial grants. To date, the grants awarded for the \$ 24 million treatment plant are \$15 million. Bluewater's net portion (21.4%) will be \$1.6 million. Construction of the plant is expected to start this year and be completed in the year 2011. The next phases will depend on South Huron and Bluewater reaching agreement, doing the EA, determining the funding and completing the collection system. When the time comes, all properties serviced by municipal water and probably all development properties in the service area will share in the treatment system (\$1.6 m) and collection system (\$9.4 m) costs. Bluewater Municipality is expected to offer alternative methods for land-owners to pay their portion of these system costs. Estimated net costs as calculated by BSRA are roughly \$10,500 per property. Users will be required to hook up to the collection system at their own expense.

Throughout the discussions, the Board of BSRA has made it clear to Council that our Lakeshore owners have had varying and conflicting opinions on the need for a sanitary sewer and on its design. Some property owners have taken the stance that the new sewer is an important opportunity – to take advantage of government grants, to improve our physical environment, to replace decaying septic systems, and to facilitate more modern development. Others have expressed the view that existing septic systems are adequate and that sewer costs will be a burden for some. The BSRA Board has weighed these viewpoints and has taken a clear and unanimous stance: the construction of a sanitary sewer is consistent with the BSRA emphasis on improving the quality of our environment, on helping to improve water quality, and on enabling improved development. The Board believes that it is important to take advantage of this opportunity while it exists, at a time when the province views it favourably and is prepared to share the costs. The past failures of Bayfield to connect to the drinking water pipeline and of Crediton to maintain an adequate sewage system have been instructive.

The cost to property owners will be significant. However the Board anticipates that property values will increase with sewers. In addition, the Board notes that the service life of septic systems is usually less than 25 years, especially on clay soil. Most of our septic systems are more than 25 years old. The very high cost of replacing old septic systems and contaminated weeping bed soil can now be avoided. Bluewater Council is developing a policy to allow the temporary use of holding tanks for renovations and new homes.

Further information about the information sources, treatment plant and collection system construction, project cost estimates, individual property costs, holding tank rules and the status of the South-West Bluewater sewage treatment and sewage collection projects is available at www.bsra.ca/priorities/sewers_and_water.htm .

Organizing for the 2010 Election

The next municipal election will take place in November of next year. As in the past, it will be critically important for Bluewater shoreline residents to attain good representation on the 10 member Bluewater Council, as well as on County Council. One important component of this process will be to ensure that shoreline property owners prepare for and then return the mail-in ballots when they arrive at your primary residence. In the last election, the percentage of returned ballots was much lower than we would like. The Board is asking that leaders in every shoreline subdivision begin NOW to organize to “get out the vote” in the fall of 2010. Read the local papers, discuss the current local issues, and try to assess the performance of current and prospective Bluewater and County Councillors with your neighbours.

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President

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