

Blue Mountain Ratepayers Association (BMRA)

Position Paper re County Service Delivery Efficiency / Uploading Programs

November 25, 2020

The BMRA is aware that the County is developing an approach for evaluating operational improvement proposals, either across all municipalities, such as the uploading of waste services tabled by Meaford, or between subsets of municipalities. As you know, our association has been endorsing the idea that the County pursue such opportunities, seeing them as potentially offering financial benefits to Grey municipalities. We also recognize that evaluating proposals for shared services across municipalities is a complex exercise, fraught with the risk of unanticipated consequences. For this reason, the BMRA offers the following considerations and criteria that we believe should be incorporated into the analytical framework applied to these exercises.

- 1) “Think Outside the Box” – The pursuit of service delivery enhancements should not be limited to new County-wide service models. As suggested, there could be opportunities that would most logically involve just a few of the Grey municipalities. Also, service agreements between Grey municipalities and partners outside Grey County may prove viable. For example, the Town of Blue Mountains currently employs inter-County service models with Collingwood for police and a portion of our water supply, and public transit with Collingwood and Wasaga. Not allowing our collective thinking to be limited by Grey County boundaries could prove advantageous.
- 2) “Do No Harm” - Whenever amalgamating services across the County, the idea that no municipality should find itself in a worse off position than their status quo should be non-negotiable. The only exception would be if a municipality determined that a short-term cost increase would provide long term benefits to its residents. One of the factors that could help to ensure new efficiency models benefit all municipalities would be to ensure cost allocations are applied on a per household basis, rather than applying the tax levy formula. This would ensure a direct link between the benefits received and costs borne.

- 3) “No Surprises” – It would be absolutely essential that all participating municipalities be able to bring current, accurate data to the table in evaluating any efficiency or uploading concepts. This must include completed Asset Management Plans for each jurisdiction, as well as disclosure of any relevant obligations or unfunded liabilities that could impact achievable efficiencies and / or pose financial risk. The analysis would also need to identify the value of relevant assets that different municipalities could provide for shared benefit, such as TBM’s waste management facility which has an estimated 30-year remaining life span. Recognizing this would entail significant data sourcing and analysis, we anticipate that it may be necessary to bring on extra resources to support this effort.

- 4) “Play the Long Game” – Opportunities to capture efficiencies can often be looked at with a short-term lens, reflective of the fact that governments may approach issues within the timeframe of their current term in office. Avoiding the appeal of approaches that would allow us to realize immediate benefits, but could expose municipalities to significant long range cost challenges, must be avoided.

The BMRA looks forward to reviewing the County’s model for evaluating efficiency and uploading proposals. If the analytics applied are sound and fact based, there could well be opportunities for all Grey municipalities to benefit.

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