



Town of The Blue Mountains

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OFFICE OF: Mayor Alar Soever

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Sent via E-mail

March 10, 2021

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Hon. Steve Clark | Minister | minister.mah@ontario.ca

777 Bay Street, 17th Floor

Toronto, ON M5G 2E5

Dear Minister Clark,

RE: COVID-19 Recovery Funding

We are very disappointed that the 2021 COVID-19 Recovery Funding for Municipalities program to support COVID-19 operating costs and pressures does not include an application based portion as was done in Phase 2. (see Council resolution attached). As you will recall, we expressed our appreciation for this very progressive needs-based approach to funding in our delegation at ROMA.

Now, instead of addressing the real needs that individual communities have in dealing with COVID, the new funding announced March 4, 2021 is allocated by the number of households and by the number of cases within the Health Unit. This fails to recognize the unique circumstances and real costs that municipalities have had and continue to have in addressing COVID. Actually, somewhat perversely, the formula actually awards communities that did little and had higher case counts.

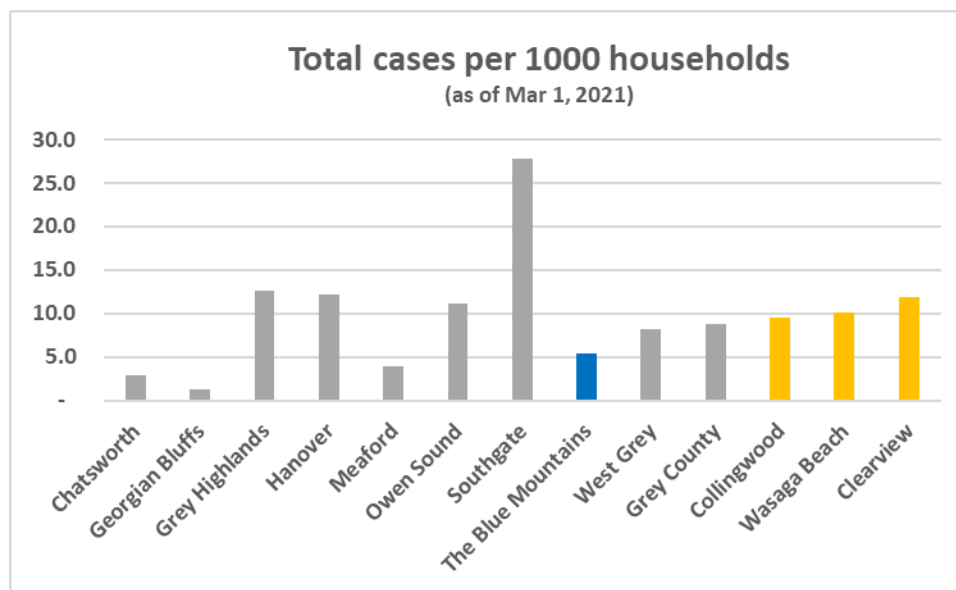
Last year in The Town of The Blue Mountains COVID had a total negative budget impact of \$2,301,500, (\$902,000 in COVID related costs and \$1,399,500 in lost revenue.) As we are a popular tourist destination which hosts some 2.5 M visitors per year, approximately \$433,000 of these costs were connected with managing COVID risks related to our tourism.

Throughout the pandemic we did not turn our fellow Ontarian's away, as some other communities did, but rather implemented measures to keep our community and visitors safe. These included the following:

- Hiring additional By law staff to respond to COVID-19 related complaints and inquires and to manage capacity of our beaches (We thank the province for the speed reduction on Highway 26 this summer so we could manage capacity on our waterfront safely)
- Implementing paid parking at high-volume beachfront areas to manage traffic;
- Installing jersey barriers and handwashing stations in downtown Thornbury to increase sidewalk space to allow for appropriate physical distancing requirements;
- Installing COVID-19 safety signage throughout the Town to support education and awareness;

- Implementing a Mandatory Face Covering By-law to expanding the Provincial mask order to include the retail customer as well as the business operator in order to reinforce the importance of wearing a mask indoors/enclosed spaces throughout the Town;
- Producing a weekly video message from myself updating our citizens on the status of COVID cases and reminding them to follow public health advice.

These measures were effective in keeping our case counts below that of most of our neighbouring municipalities, in spite of the fact we host far more tourists.



The \$2,301,500 in costs and lost revenue, were offset by \$1,375,000 in cost savings we were able to find at the local municipal level, \$880,500 in Safe Restart Funding, and \$46,000 which needed to be funded from reserves.

2020 Safe Restart Funding

Ontario Safe Restart Funding Phase 1	\$495,500
Ontario Safe Restart Funding Application based Phase 2	\$385,000
Total Ontario Safe Restart 2020 Funding	\$880,500

In addition, we have tried to mitigate the costs by finding efficiencies and in fact have just completed the 2021 budget with a 1.13 percent tax increase using zero based budgeting principles in the main town departments. We have also looked to maximize revenue from other non-taxation revenue sources, and have lead the county in finding missing assessment revenue.

This year, with the Province promoting 2021 as Year of the Ontario Staycation, we expect that we will again have to again manage excess COVID related tourism in our community, including capacity on our beaches and trails, and promote social distancing, and other COVID health measures. As such we anticipate our costs to be similar to last year. Our current estimate of 2021 costs is about \$900,000.

2021 Safe Restart Funding

Funding Stage	
Phase 2 for 2021	\$99,000
March 2021 COVID-19 Recovery Funding	\$148,523

The funding we will be receiving for 2021 however, will amount to only \$247,523, leaving us about \$650,000 short. This is only in terms of COVID expenses. In addition, we anticipate that we will again have a substantial revenue shortfall in 2021. Recognizing the hardship resulting from the shutdown of the ski industry this winter we have waived interest for property taxes and utility bills for the period from April 1 to June 30th, to allow our businesses and residents to get back on their feet after a lost winter season. We accept we will again have to find savings to cover this lost revenue ourselves, as we did last year.

We had and continue to have real costs keeping not only our residents, but also visitors from other parts of Ontario safe. We don't expect the province to cover all our costs and the revenue shortfall caused by shutdowns of our tourism businesses due to high case counts in other parts of the province. Neither did we expect to be penalized by a formula that penalizes us just because we were successful in keeping case counts low.

Please consider adding an additional phase of application funding to support tourist communities such as ours who actually invest to make sure we keep all Ontarians safe, visitors and residents alike.

Respectfully submitted,



Mayor Alar Soever
Town of The Blue Mountains

Enclosed: Resolution – March 8, 2021

CC: Premier Ford (via email)
Hon. Jim Wilson, MPP Simcoe-Grey (via email)
Hon. Bill Walker, MPP Bruce-Grey (via email)
Saif Sumbal, Manager, Local Government and Housing – Western Municipal Services (via email)
Stephanie DiNucci, Senior Policy Advisor for Municipal Affairs (via email)
Association of Municipalities of Ontario (via email)
Municipalities of Ontario (via email)
Council, Town of The Blue Mountains (via email)
Shawn Everitt, CAO, Town of The Blue Mountains (via email)
Ruth Prince, Director of Finance & IT Services, Town of The Blue Mountains (via email)
Department File – C2048



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March 8, 2021

Moved by: Deputy Mayor Potter

Seconded by: Councillor Bordignon

THAT Council of the Town of The Blue Mountains receives for information the February 23, 2021 correspondence thank you letter from Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing at the ROMA Conference Delegation;

AND THAT Council of the Town of The Blue Mountains receives the March 4, 2021 correspondence from Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing regarding COVID-19 Recovery Funding;

AND THAT Council request Mayor Soever respond to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Association of Municipalities of Ontario and to other municipalities, as appropriate, in response to the COVID-19 Recovery Funding being provided,

Councillor Bordignon	Yay
Councillor Hope	Yay
Councillor Matrosovs	Absent
Deputy Mayor Potter	Yay
Councillor Sampson	Yay
Councillor Uram	Yay
Mayor Soever	Yay
The motion is CARRIED .	

CERTIFIED TO BE A TRUE COPY

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Krista Royal", is written over a dotted line.

Krista Royal, Deputy Clerk