To the Editor of the Review;

Re: The opinion piece of Michael Martin

While informed debate about community issues is healthy, purposely spreading misinformation and false rumours is not healthy for our community. It is for this reason as Mayor and as a Director of The Blue Mountains Attainable Housing Corporation I feel compelled to set the record straight and respond to Mr. Martin’s letter regarding the Gateway project in the strongest terms.

Had it been someone else, one could have assumed that perhaps Mr. Martin was misinformed, and the misstatements in his letter were out of ignorance. However, given Mr. Martin’s history as a Councillor who was on Council in 2012 when The Blue Mountains Attainable Housing Corporation (“BMAHC”) was founded, and for the next six years until he was defeated in 2018, one can only assume his statements were designed to deliberately mislead the public about the nature of the Corporation.

Let me address the misleading aspects of his letter:

1) First, Mr. Martin mistakenly refers to the Blue Mountains Attainable Housing Corporation, an organization which was founded and which was funded to the tune of $105,000 while he was on Council as “the Housing Corp Committee”. Mr. Martin knows or should know by virtue of his time on Council that The Blue Mountains Attainable Housing Corporation is a corporation owned and controlled by the Town and is not a Committee of Council. While the Corporation is not required to do so, the Board of the Corporation has agreed to follow the rules and procedures of the Town to increase operational transparency as much as possible.

2) Second, Mr. Martin states that “The reason for the project as perceived by some is to address a perceived labour supply deficit by providing cheap housing for tourism workers. However this perception needs to be more than an a few anecdotal studies. Where is the real evidence.” He knows full well that there was an extensive study done, as he was on the Council when the Town of The Blue Mountains participated in The South Georgian Bay Tourism Labour Supply Task Force, South Georgian Bay Tourism Industry Workforce Housing Study, which was completed in May 2018. That study clearly concluded that there has been long standing and deepening labour supply deficit faced by all businesses in the Town and not just in the tourism sector.

3) Mr. Martin implies that ratepayers will be paying for the activities of the BMAHC. “This responsibility and costs should not be on the backs of ratepayers. Ratepayers will not be paying for this. The fact is that the BMAHC was originally funded by a financial bonusing contribution of $120,000 by a developer. Between 2012 and 2018 previous councils, on which Mr. Martin was a Councillor, supplemented this amount by a total of $105,000. The current Council continued the practice of providing $20,000 per year, and has agreed to provide the Corporation a working capital line of credit for $100,000. This loan bears interest at a rate in excess of what the Town earns on its investments, so the ratepayers are not bearing any cost from this loan and are actually benefitting. The BMAHC is responsible for sourcing its own funding and being financially self-sufficient. Funding will be provided by grants from other levels of government and traditional private sector project financing, with any debt to be repaid by rental revenue. The
business plan calls for a significant portion of rental revenue to be secured by head leases to mitigate risk. As a non-profit, BMAHC has successfully sought out grants to support development of the site and will continue to seek funding opportunities in the future. To date, over $470,000 in grants have been approved in addition to cost savings of $7500 have been realized from discounts provided by vendors who want to make a difference in the lives of people of our community.

4) Mr. Martin asks, “What are criteria for occupants of the rental housing proposed for the building: are Seniors permitted, are provisions made for people with health challenges, or is it exclusive for employees of the tourism sector?” and states, “The public needs all the information, Council must live up to being transparent and open.” All of the information Mr. Martin seeks, is on The Blue Mountain Attainable Housing Corporation website [https://www.thebluemountainshousing.ca/](https://www.thebluemountainshousing.ca/). This site contains the eligibility requirements for prospective occupants [https://www.thebluemountainshousing.ca/programs/attainable-rental-program](https://www.thebluemountainshousing.ca/programs/attainable-rental-program). Mr. Martin knows that the BMAHC, which he now pretends not to know the name of and calls the “Housing Corp Committee”, is a not-for-profit corporation which is owned by the Town. Its operations are governed by a Board of Directors which is made up of 2 Council members and 6 members of the public. Meetings are open to the public. Board materials are posted on the BMAHC website, so for Mr. Martin to pretend that there is a lack of transparency is dishonest. The public has access to the same material that the Board has. I invite Mr. Martin to review all of the materials on the BMAHC website, and then contact me with any remaining questions he may have.

5) Lastly, Mr. Martin concludes with “Where is the accountability if as rumour suggests 5 members of Council may not run.” I can confirm that I have heard from all six other members of Council and all take issue with this statement. All have stated that they are enjoying their time on Council, making positive contributions to our community, and at this time none have decided that they will not run for election next time.

Last election the electorate decided that attainable housing was a priority and that those who work here should be able to live here. Those who made attainable housing a priority were elected and are fulfilling their mandate. Honest debate is healthy and part of democratic process and I have always promoted this. Dishonest discourse and deceptive writings from those who should know better, however, are toxic and have no place in our community.

Alar Soever,
Mayor